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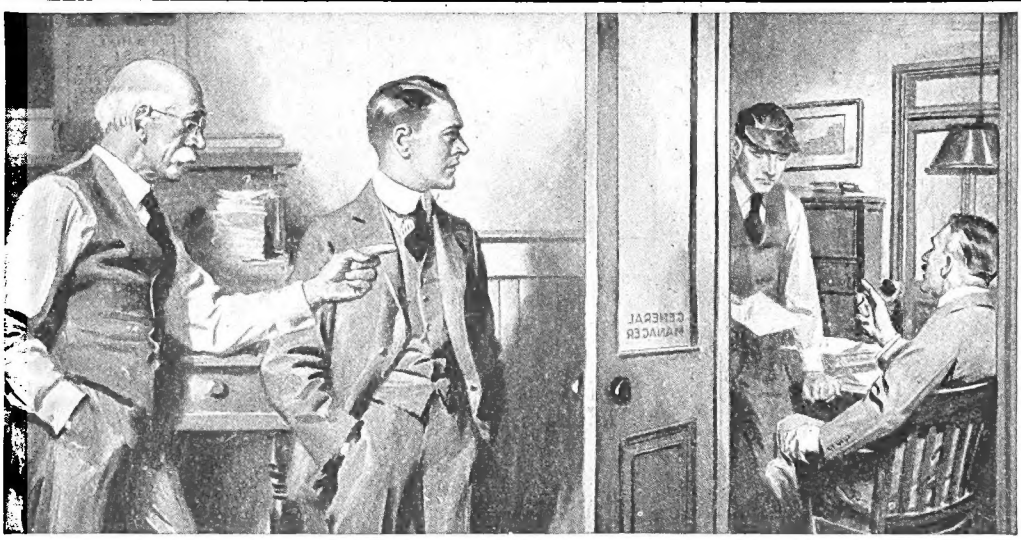

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"WITH SHARP SWORD-EDGES"

A Five-Part Story

By Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

A thrilling tale of the stirring Viking days in old Norway. It is by the authors of "Malena." First instalment in this issue.

"THE PHONEY MAN"

A Complete Novelette

By Patrick and Terence Casey

The adventures of *Frisco Kid* and his buddy *Gay Cat* in a tramp through the Southland. By the authors of "According to His Caste."

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MID-JANUARY ISSUE

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Adventure
JANUARY 3, 1918
VOL 16 NO 1

THE TRAIL OF THE BLACK FOX

A COMPLETE NOVEL

BY

KATHRENE and ROBERT PINKERTON

Authors of "The Northwoman," "Penitentiary Post," etc.

CHAPTER I

A JOB FOR TWILIGHT

JOHN REID'S interest in ethnology was absorbing so long as his activities were confined to books, class-rooms, museums and reports of original investigators. When he himself took to the field there was a sudden lessening in scientific enthusiasm. To his surprise, he found that the people he had been studying were alive, human, being born, dying, working, frolicking.

Immediately his interest became human rather than scientific, and six months after his first contact with the Ojibway of the Canadian wilderness he had established a home among them. It was not the settlement worker's idea of service that prompted this action. He did not feel that he was devoting his life to a cause, sacrificing comfort and companionship with his kind to become a missionary. He was a thoroughly normal young man with a keen desire for the open, and he was more happy in his little cabin fifty miles from the railroad, with only the forest dwellers for neighbors, than he had ever been before.

His father's estate eliminated the necessity of making a living, and he snow-shoed and paddled and hunted and launched himself into the hearts of the Indians until, at the end of three years, he was thoroughly in their confidence, and they considered him thoroughly their friend. Any one who has ever tried to establish friendly relations with an Ojibway will know that John was not a bookish recluse.

For two years he had not returned to the States and in that time he had seen few white people except on his trips to the railroad for supplies and to post long reports

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to an old professor in an eastern college. Despite his new activities, his new interests, John had not forgotten the science which had first sent him to the wilderness, and these reports, unknown to their author, were attracting attention because they gave an insight into the life and thoughts and habits of the aborigines which a lack of sympathy on the part of the purely scientific investigator had kept hidden. He had turned sociologist and had thereby become a greater ethnologist.

John did not consider that he had isolated himself. He had come to value the friendships formed with his red neighbors, and his interest in them and in the country kept him fully occupied. Unconsciously he began to adopt the viewpoint, the habits, the methods of thinking, of the wilderness, for very seldom did he meet people like those he had known in the cities. He was the more surprised then, when Joel Ball called at his cabin one forenoon the first week in April.

Ball's knock at the door had startled him. He was more accustomed to the silent, unannounced entrance of the Indian. And Ball himself was so different. The Indian idea of politeness, to which he always adheres, is to remain silent for fifteen minutes that his host may have time to adjust himself and gather his thoughts. Ball had never even considered the advantages of such a custom and his life and training would never have permitted such a waste of time.

"My name's Ball," he said when John opened the door. "Joel Ball. I'm a shareholder in the fox-farm over there. You're Mr. Reid. Glad to meet you," and he extended his hand.

John had almost forgotten there was such a type, that there was such a person as the American business man, but he collected himself sufficiently to greet his visitor and to offer him a bench beside the stove.

For a minute Ball spoke of the weather, made a polite remark about John's cabin, and then plunged into the subject of his errand.

"I came over to see you on business, Mr. Reid," he began. "I want some information and I want some help. I understand you have a lot of power over these Indians around here and that they'll take orders from you."

"That's hardly—," John attempted to interrupt, but Ball hurried on.

"What I want to know is this. Will they steal, will they do underhanded things to get even with a man, or anything of that sort?"

"There isn't a thief in this district, unless it is a white man," answered John with some heat, "and an Indian does not resort to underhanded methods to obtain revenge."

"That's what I've understood. Now do you know if any of your Indians have anything against the fox-farm people?"

"The Indians, and they're no more mine than yours, have good reason to have anything but good will toward the fox-farm, but they never have and never will attempt any retaliation."

"There was some trouble, wasn't there?"

"There was no trouble. Spencer Baynes came here more than a year ago to establish this fox-farm. He came with the fixed idea that all Indians are thieves and beggars. At my suggestion he hired several Indians to help in getting up his buildings and pens. He refused to give them fair treatment. They left, and he refused to pay what he had promised. I tried to obtain justice for the Indians but was not successful. Because I had induced the Indians to accept the work—none of them had ever worked for wages before—I made good what Baynes had refused to pay them.

"As for retaliation, there has been no thought of it among the Indians. They merely consider Baynes another crooked white man and have left him alone. Had the Indians believed they should have revenge they would have gone to Baynes's island and obtained it openly."

"That was my opinion," said Ball. "You never visit the fox-farm?"

"Hardly, after my friends and I had been accorded such treatment."

John hesitated a moment, then went on: "It wasn't left for me to choose, however. Baynes ordered me off the place the last time I was there."

Ball looked at the young man closely and for the first time John had an impression of something besides unalloyed business in the man's make-up.

"Still, Myra Baynes is an unusually charming young woman," the visitor said at last. "And she is the only one of her color within a great many miles, I understand."

John flushed, both from confusion and

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from indignation, but before he could speak Ball went on:

"I had hoped you were a visitor there, Mr. Reid, and that you would know something of conditions. The point is this: There is something rotten at the fox-farm and I can't find out what it is. If possible, I want you to help me get at the bottom of it. I have money invested there and I want returns or know the reason why. Do you know anything about fox-farming?"

"Only what little I've read and heard."

"Well, I'll explain this one briefly. The company was incorporated for one hundred thousand dollars. Baynes, who was a successful business man, originated the idea. He has a lot of money tied up in property which will be valuable some day but which is worthless now so far as ready cash is concerned.

"Then, he lost his grip a few years ago. Booze. That's why he wanted to get up here. Or maybe it was his daughter's suggestion. Anyhow, she is the brains of the family now, though it isn't to save the money but to save him that she is working. A great girl, Miss Baynes."

He stopped for a moment and stared at the fire, and again John felt that his first impression of this brusk, matter-of-fact little man had been wrong.

"Good-looking girls don't often have much else," Ball finally went on. "But Myra Baynes has. She's the kind that men and women both like, if you know what I mean, and she's been cultivating a halo this last year. Between trying to straighten out her father and keep that fox-farm on its feet, she's had a man-sized job, and I'd be the last to do anything that would upset her work. But——"

He had lapsed from his quick, decisive tone and his eyes had wandered from his host's face to the stove. With the last word he sat up suddenly and faced John.

"Business is business!" he exclaimed, more in definition of his own position. "Baynes put all he had into this thing, fifty-five thousand dollars. I took a quarter interest, twenty-five thousand dollars, and the rest went to Foster Stritt, twenty thousand dollars. There was a time when Baynes's 'yes' was as good to me as a bottle of some men's ink. Now? Booze. Once I had perfect faith in Baynes's honesty and ability. Booze knocked out my belief in his ability, and facts bore me out. Now booze is knocking out my belief in his honesty, though I haven't all the facts. And of course I can't act until I get them."

He paused and looked searchingly at John. When the young man did not speak he went on:

"Things have gone wrong from the start. Despite my protest, Baynes insisted on putting the farm up here fifty miles from the railroad. It cost money to get things in. Then came the labor trouble. You know about that. Next a pair of foxes, guaranteed by the Prince Edward Island man from whom we bought them to breed pure, failed to produce a pup last Spring. We paid forty thousand dollars for that pair. Perhaps you have heard of them, Black Hector and his mate.

"There is another pair for which we paid ten thousand dollars and four inferior pairs. I say there is. I don't know. That is on the company's books. That is what Baynes says. But I don't know. I haven't seen them."

"Haven't seen them!" John exclaimed.

"No, and it looks as though I wouldn't. Baynes says the presence of strangers, especially at breeding time, may prove disastrous. He won't let me near the pens. Only Baynes, his daughter, Tom Geggie, the foreman, and Paquette, the man they call the bull-cook, ever go near the pens. I've been here two weeks and I don't know what a black fox looks like.

"Stritt tells me the same thing. Stritt came up here three months ago and hasn't seen a fox yet. I'll tell you about Stritt.

"He's a young man who never worked. He was left enough money and in his case I tried not to let my prejudice against an idle man influence me. He's an agreeable, good-looking chap. Every one agreed he was harmless, if he was worthless. But I got some information last Winter that in one way or another he's gone through all that was left him, and that about all he has is the twenty thousand dollars he put into this fox-farm.

"WHEN I came up I expected Stritt to help me get at the bottom of this. On my arrival I saw that he and Baynes were not hitting it off well. But Stritt only laughed at me and said things were going all right. I asked him questions, and I asked Baynes questions, and I got the idea that both of them were

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trying to put me off. I talked to Geggie and he told me more by keeping still than the others did with all their answers. Paquette doesn't know anything except to cut wood and carry water. But Geggie knows everything that's been going on there, only he thinks he fooled me by pretending not to.

"After I'd talked to Geggie a few times I went back to Stritt. I couldn't get him interested. It made me mad, seeing him lying there on his bunk smoking cigarets and not turning over a hand to help himself when his last cent was tied up in that thing.

"And then all of a sudden it hit me what he was up to. Baynes owns a majority of stock in the fox-farm and he has this other property that will be worth a lot of money some day. And Myra is his only child. I looked at Stritt and I guess he saw that I understood. He just grinned and waved his cigaret.

"Well, I boiled over then. I told him exactly what I thought of him, and he kept right on grinning. And then I told him that I was going to Baynes with what I knew. I lost my head, I guess. It was none of my business but I couldn't stand there and let a nice girl like Myra be only a tool in Stritt's scheme. I told him I'd tell her."

Ball stopped and looked at the coals glowing in the open draft of the box-stove. John, stunned somewhat by the intimate nature of these disclosures, only stared at his visitor. Ball looked up and caught his expression.

"I know you think it's strange for me to come over here and tell you all this," he went on. "But I feel that I have to do it. In town I could call up the police, or the district attorney, or a lawyer, or talk it over with a friend. Up here there is no representative of the law whatever and I don't know a soul in Canada except on that island. But I do know about you.

"I had to wait in Abiwin two days on my way here and Mr. Hogan, the postmaster, told me of you and so has Miss Baynes. And I'll say that they told me enough to make me feel that I can trust you and depend on you. To me this hasn't been like talking to a perfect stranger, and I tell you, Mr. Reid, I've got to tell some one. I've got to get some help.

"Now Stritt sat up on his bunk in the men's camp, where we were talking, and for the first time I saw some force and character in the man. He told me to keep my hands off his affairs and that if I did not I would never meddle with any one else. It really did me good, even if it was a threat against my life, for that's how he meant it, to see him show that he wasn't simply a wearer of trousers.

"'Bully for you, Stritt,' I told him. 'Anyhow, I know where you stand.'

"'And be careful where you stand,' he told me. 'You've got a quarter-interest in this fox-farm and no interest in anything else on the place.'

"So there I am. Stritt's practically admitted his little game. He's betting his last twenty thousand dollars against all Baynes owns. Geggie knows Baynes has a controlling interest and doesn't care about anything but his seventy-five dollars a month. Paquette doesn't know anything except how long a stick of wood each stove will take. Baynes does nothing but rail against Indians, and, even to save my twenty-five thousand dollars, I wouldn't go to Myra with what I suspect."

"But what do you suspect?" demanded John, his interest finally aroused and the question coming involuntarily.

"Nothing definite, except that I have reason to believe there are not six pairs of foxes on the island and that they have been killed and their pelts sold to raise money. I know the company has hardly a cent in its treasury, everything having been spent for foxes and building the plant. Geggie knows what is doing and so does Stritt. Myra Baynes doesn't, or doesn't understand. I don't know what it is, and I stand to lose twenty-five thousand dollars."

This return to the financial side of a problem that had developed such unexpected personal features brought John Reid back to his original position with a jerk.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Ball," he said politely, "that I can not help you. I am not welcome at the fox-farm. I would not think of going there. If you need any one, you need a policeman. But I can't see any grounds for your suspicions."

"There are grounds!" exclaimed Ball. "Baynes has something on his mind, is worrying, scheming, all the time. He goes down to the pens at night. He says he is afraid the Indians will come to steal the foxes. But Paquette and Geggie are supposed to do that work. Stritt's manner is a practical admission that he knows what's

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up. Geggie's silence confirms it, his silence and the few things I have been able to worm out of him. Myra Baynes is worried about something besides her father. There is a conspiracy of silence against me there.

"I thought you might be of some help in looking around. Coming over as my guest, you know. You might see things I haven't. You've lived in the woods. I'm sorry you won't come."

Again came one of those pauses in which John had learned to look for a complete change in the man. He was not disappointed this time.

"It's not only the fox-farm, Mr. Reid," he said in a lower tone. "It's not only my money tied up there. No man likes to lose twenty-five thousand dollars. But I can't stand for this unhealthy atmosphere about the place. It's uncanny. I can't explain it. But it's there and you can't help but feel it, and it can't help but have its effect on Myra Baynes. That's the reason I came over here. I wouldn't ask help for myself. But she's in trouble and I know it. Things are happening there, and it's no place for a girl like her, out in this wilderness with no sort of help if it's needed."

"I still don't see how I could aid you," said John, softened by the man's evident sincerity.

"Perhaps not. I took a chance on you, that's all. I'll do it myself. Tonight, when the others are asleep, I'm going to have a look at those pens. I'm going to know whether there are six pairs of foxes there and, if not, what became of them and who is responsible. I'm through asking questions."

John suddenly found himself admiring this little man of blunt speech but of equally blunt honesty. His little shoulders were squared ridiculously above the round little stomach. The young man felt that Ball arrayed his own dragons before his lance, but the evident sincerity and generosity of his attitude precluded any thought of burlesque.

John saw, too, the possible attraction of Myra Baynes for this man so thoroughly of the business type and the consequent ideas and dreams of middle-aged chivalry, the inevitable fear of youth as expressed in the person of Stritt. It would have been laughable had it not borne serious possibilities, this sudden unseating of sound business reason by the heretofore untasted wine of romance. The young man felt only pity, a pity that left him ill-prepared for Ball's next words.

"You see," he said almost in a whisper. "I had a little girl who would have been Myra's age. Mrs. Ball and I have taken out something of what we lost in Myra, who never saw her mother. Mrs. Ball has always looked upon her as her daughter, and, now that Baynes has gone to pieces, I have sometimes placed myself in his shoes, so to speak."

John, struck by the pathos of the man's tone rather than his words, grasping to steady himself in the face of this new aspect of the case, impulsively thrust out his hand. Ball, who had risen and walked toward the door, took it mechanically.

"I can't help you, directly, but I think I can otherwise," John declared warmly. "I'm not welcome at the fox-farm and could not accomplish any of the things you wish. But I have a friend who is just the man for the job. He is a trapper, and I'll bring him over tomorrow morning. Perhaps you have heard of him. He is called 'Twilight Jack.'"

"Now that's fine!" exclaimed Ball, his gratitude finding expression in a renewed handshake and a happy light in his eyes. "I have heard of him, over at the island. Something of a detective, isn't he?"

"Don't tell him you've heard so," laughed John. "He says he's only a woodsman who uses his eyes, though he has really done some remarkable bits of work for the Provincial police. I'm glad to count Twilight as a friend and I think I can persuade him to see you. He lives thirty miles from here but he uses my cabin one night a week on his trap line and he'll be here tonight. I think you can count on seeing us early, before the going gets soft."

"That's fine," repeated Ball. "He'll not regret it. I'll make it well worth his while. Good-by until tomorrow."

He hurried down the trail. John stood watching him until he disappeared around the first bend. Ball's last remark, his return at the end to the business side of the case, his offer of payment, had chilled the young man's enthusiasm.

It was none of his business, he thought. He did not wish to have anything to do with the fox-farm or Baynes. They should settle their own business quarrels. Yet when he turned back into the room and

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closed the door he found himself impatient for the morning to come.

CHAPTER II

BALL'S FEARS CONFIRMED

JOHN REID had spent just enough time at the fox-farm the previous Spring to learn that Myra Baynes was all that Ball had said of her. In fact, there had been something more than an awakened interest when the trouble over the Indians occurred.

Naturally John himself had held some attractions for Miss Baynes. He was an entirely presentable and agreeable young man and his history, his rather unusual life, furnished elements bordering upon the romantic. Besides, no young woman would ignore the challenge offered by John's voluntary isolation in the wilderness.

It was not alone the summary action of Baynes in forbidding John to come to the fox farm. The command had been given in one of the characteristically tempestuous rages of the older man. Baynes himself probably forgot it a month later. Perhaps John would have done the same.

But when he had carried his case for the Indians to Myra, had gone to her with the firm belief that she would see the justice of his contentions, she had upheld her father. It was something John could never quite forget and he had religiously refrained from going near the island. Though their homes were only five miles apart, he had not seen Myra since that day the previous Spring.

It had not been easy for him to keep away. His first years among the Indians had passed so quickly, had been so full of many things, there had been little time for loneliness. With the coming of Myra, however, a void in his life had developed. His interest had been aroused by this girl who had come to live near him, and the very fact that she was near had not permitted that interest to wane, even though he did not see her.

Only something like Ball's visit had been required to fan into flame what had been smoldering. John had not closed the door on his visitor before he began planning for the next day. It really startled him, the unsuspected strength of his desire to see Myra again, and in boyish anticipation he spent the remainder of the afternoon washing his best shirt, searching for a tie he remembered having seen in the cabin two years before, and brushing his one hat into a half respectable appearance.

Twilight Jack arrived in time to perform that duty of a woodsman to all brother woodsmen.

"You'd be worth more dead and skinned," the trapper commented as, comb between his teeth and fingers running through the long-uncared for locks of his friend, he plied the shears. "You must plan on visiting the fox-farm."

"How did you know that?" demanded John in some confusion.

"Why, I'd do the same thing myself if I was going over there. If I had as long a coat as you've growed this Winter I'd be afraid old Baynes would skin me and sell my pelt."

"It happens that I am going over early in the morning, Jack, and that I want you to go with me."

"Not me. From all I've heard of Baynes and his outfit, I don't want nothing to do with it."

John did not press the question then. His hair cut and supper eaten and the dishes washed, they filled their pipes and took seats across the stove from each other. For a few minutes nothing was said, and John studied his friend and the best means of obtaining his cooperation.

Probably because they "don't grow any more," it is seldom that a man of Twilight Jack's type is found today in the North Woods. Conditions that evolved the woodsman of the old school are fast vanishing. Here and there, stuck off in some odd corner, left behind in the migration to newer and more distant forests, one is to be seen.

The difference is more in the man himself than in his appearance. Others wear wool trousers rolled up neatly and evenly, wool shirts that are clean and, if need be, cleverly patched. Others have faces as deeply tanned, eyes circled by as deep sun wrinkles. There is the same appearance of clumsiness in a body that moves, nevertheless, with the ease and lack of effort of a motor car. The hands, too, are hard and brown and crooked by years of paddle and ax-clasping.

Many men of the open have this appearance, but there the similarity stops if there is to be a comparison with the woodsman of an older generation. Railroads have penetrated the forests and robbed the inhabitants of the necessity of that continuous

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exercise of ingenuity which enabled the first comers to thrive in a hostile environment. Towns have grown up and work is plentiful. The woodsman of today is in the woods, not of it, and merely because his work carries him there.

Twilight Jack was of another breed. He lived in the wilderness because he loved it. He understood it, knew when to humor it, when to affront it. Its moods were his moods, or he rose above them and his mood conquered. The forest was his mistress. It loved him the more when he beat it.

Naturally this intimacy of a lifetime led to a certain competence which to some appears supernatural. But Twilight merely knew the ways of the forest and of those who people it. He merely saw what many years of training had permitted him to see. When he overcame the seemingly unsurmountable he merely did what experience and an ever-keen ingenuity told him was the obvious thing to do.

Yet there is something in an old woodsman other than his physical competency. Long years alone in distant, solitary places, endless days and nights in the silent woods or on great, lifeless lakes, all these tend to produce a different breed of men. It is, rather, a test. Those who endure, who survive, have a mental as well as a physical equipment above the ordinary, for the test is of the mind more than of the body.

Those who come out of the wilderness are great, strong men, greater in spirit than in strength, stronger in mind than in body. And yet, so strange is the wilderness, they come out chastened despite their defiance, softened despite the rigors of their lives. They live by killing and have hearts as tender as a woman's. They live by force, by rude, rough contact with the raw, and their spirit is as humble as a saint's.

Twilight Jack was one of these lovable, clean, strong men now so rarely found in the great stretches of wilderness that lie to the north of us. But only in his gray eyes was there an indication of it, only through months of companionship were his nobler qualities discovered.

John Reid knew him, loved him for what he was; and it was with entire confidence, despite his friend's emphatic declaration, that he began to persuade the trapper to accompany him to the fox-farm the next morning.

"It's getting so soft fur's no good anyhow, Jack," he said.

"I know, but I've got to get up my traps."

"You can do that with a couple of cold nights. You got all those between here and your last cabin today."

"But I don't want to have anything to do with Baynes," was the obstinate rejoiner.

"And I don't want to," replied John quickly, "but here's the case."

Briefly, not omitting those features which had appealed to him, John told of Ball's visit earlier in the day.

"He's just got a good imagination, that's all," was Twilight's only comment.

"That's what I thought at first, and I wasn't inclined to have anything to do with it. But it would have got you, Twilight, at the end, just as it got me. The man's sincere and he's sure something is wrong over there. He's not the kind who would come over here if he were afraid for himself, or if he merely thought he stood to lose twenty-five thousand dollars. You can see that in him, even if he did say that was the reason he came.

"But there is something going on more than he told me, I am sure. Maybe he suspects what it is and maybe he only feels it. But the man is genuinely afraid for the safety of Miss Baynes, and that's the reason he came to me."

"Miss Baynes!" exclaimed the trapper. "What has she got to do with it?"

"She practically runs the place, from what he said. Her father drinks, though she got him up here in an attempt to get away from it. He has a bad temper and he's lost his grip, Ball says, and it's Miss Baynes who hangs onto things for him and calms him down and sees that things go straight."

"But you know it's foolish, lad, our butting in over there. They don't want us and we couldn't help anyhow."

"Maybe we can, Jack. Maybe there is something we can do. In any event, it won't hurt us to try, and ten miles won't kill us. Besides, I promised Ball I'd bring you over."

"Promised Ball!"

There was a twinkle in Twilight's gray eyes as he glanced across the stove, though there was not even a twitch of his facial muscles.

"Yes, Ball," John retorted petulantly. "I haven't seen any one else from there."

Twilight continued to look at him, and

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the twinkle remained in his eyes. John, in confusion, bent over the bowl of his pipe as he pressed down the ashes preparatory to relighting it. When he glanced up again Twilight was reaching for the alarm clock.

"I've always hankered to see those foxes that they say are worth forty thousand," he was saying, "though why they should be worth more than just their pelts I don't know."

IT WAS still dark when they went down the half-mile trail to Beaver House Lake the next morning and they were far out on the four-mile stretch to the fox-farm island before the first signs of dawn appeared.

The two men walked side by side, while behind them trotted the trapper's big wolf-dog, My-in-gen. Mike, Twilight called him, and, as a brother trapper had once remarked, "I'd be more surprised to see Jack going somewhere without his pants than without that dog." He was a great, gray and brown animal, much like his paternal ancestors in appearance but wholly domesticated so far as his master was concerned. He pulled a small toboggan with a light load lashed on top.

"It's good going now, but it won't be long after that old boy gets a look at this ice," said Twilight, as he indicated the place where the sun would come up. "I thought for a while last night it wouldn't freeze, the clouds and the wind hung on so. But it cleared up about nine o'clock or we'd had nasty going across here."

"But the ice is good yet," John said.

"Yes, the ice is all right, but when this snow on top of it is all melted it means nearly a foot of water to wade through. The ice in this lake will be good for some time yet, but the small lakes and rivers won't be safe in a day or two if this warm weather keeps up. I hope we can get through over there and be back before it's too soft."

Half a mile from the island, broad daylight had come and they could see everything on it distinctly. It was Twilight's first visit to the lake since the coming of the outsiders and John had not been near the place since the Summer before, when building operations were only half completed.

Before the coming of Baynes and his enterprise John had often admired the crescent shaped bit of land, set like a green fortress in the center of the big lake. It was two miles from either the east or west shores and much farther from the north and south ends of the lake, and there was no other island near it. Alone, it had seemed to him, it stood, an unconquerable bit of the wilderness; something that would stand, primitive and untouched, even though white men invaded the country in their never-ending search for timber and for gold.

When Baynes had selected it as the scene of his operations John had not only had a feeling of personal loss but a fear that his unmolested wilderness was endangered. The strongest redoubt had fallen first. Now as he looked at the island across the ice he saw nothing that reminded him of the island he had known.

The north shore of the crescent bay that faced him was bare of the stand of Norway pine which had stood, sentinel like, at the gate of the forest citadel. Their trunks now formed the walls of several buildings which bordered the clearing. The largest one, near the tip of the crescent, he knew to be Baynes's home, while beyond it were the ice-house, the men's camp and the storehouse.

Across the bay, at the south tip of the crescent, the wire fencing of the great outside pen glittered in the morning light. Here little clearing had been done, but the thick growth of the spruce and balsam failed to hide entirely the steel fetters of the island's bondage.

Depression followed John's first close view of the place. The white expanse of the clearing with the black stumps of the Norways showing through the fast vanishing snow, the silent log houses, the utter absence of any indication of life, these and the remembrance of what Ball had told him, with his own recollection of the island as it had been, made him wish more than ever that he had never seen it again.

"They don't get up very early," commented Twilight.

There was no smoke above the chimneys, nor did they see any one. The two men slackened their pace as they looked curiously at the scene before them. Twilight, not missing a detail, with just a little awe in the presence of this home of two foxes for which men were willing to pay forty thousand dollars, was in advance and was the first to strike a hard, smooth path leading out from

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the bay and turning south along the island.

"Their trail to town," he said. "Dog team went out last night about dark and hasn't come back yet. I guess we'll have to wait around for them to get up."

They continued on the togobban trail past the water-hole cut in the ice of the bay and on up the bank into the clearing.

There is one time of the year when the North Woods are unattractive. When the first thaws of April come, when the dingy stumps and windfalls begin to show through the snow, when trails turn black, when the accumulated chips and sawdust and refuse of a Winter show through the drifts about a cabin door, when the lakes turn dark in spots and even the snow that has remained so pure through the long months becomes soiled and soggy; then the Northland has an unlovely appearance thoroughly in keeping with the season.

It was such a scene that lay before John Reid and Twilight Jack as they climbed the low bank to the clearing. It was typically desolate and unattractive, with the bare spots before the buildings, the trails soiled by mud, the black brush of alder, willow and ash, dismally bare of even a bud.

The path took them past the corner of the Baynes home and on toward the men's camp. Still there had been no sign of any one up. There was no smoke from the chimneys. Then Twilight wheeled suddenly to the left, John with him; and they found themselves facing a silent group on the veranda of the Baynes cabin.

"Good morning," greeted John, his hat coming off instantly.

But there was no reply. Those on the veranda only stared at him, silently, almost in terror, he thought.

There were four of them, three men and a woman. As the two drew nearer a pale young man threw a lighted cigaret away and took a fresh one from his case. He lit this and then threw it away, holding the match between his fingers.

A big-framed man, his hair gray, his face red with chronic irritability as much as from the sun, stepped forward as though he were about to speak. Then he turned to the rear of the group and stood waiting beside a French-Canadian, clearly the only woodsman of the three.

As the trapper and his friend stopped at the foot of the steps John again said "Good morning," only to be answered by a silent stare. In his perplexity he turned to the last of the group.

Clearly Myra Baynes had dressed in haste. Her hair fell unrestrained. A big mackinaw coat, probably her father's, was drawn across her shoulders. On her feet were a pair of beaded Indian moccasins.

But despite her disorderly attire, despite the fear and sorrow in her eyes, in her manner was the only calmness, in her firm mouth the only self-possession.

John's heart leaped instantly and in a fleeting second he reviewed the year he had lost and cursed himself for having lost it. Here was this wonderfully attractive girl only five miles from his home, and she had been only five miles from him for a year. His own pride, his own stubbornness, had kept him away, and for the moment he forgot the object of his presence there.

"We came to see Mr. Ball," said Twilight Jack, when he saw his friend was dumb.

"Mr. Ball is dead," Miss Baynes replied in a tone little above a whisper.

"Dead!" cried John. "Why, he was at my cabin only yesterday."

"Yes," she answered. "He was killed. Sometime in the night. Paquette has just told us of it. He found his body at the pens."

CHAPTER III

"EVERYBODY IS LYING"

JOHN REID could not adjust himself to the situation and he shared the panic which, it was clearly evident, prevailed on the veranda.

"Killed!" he exclaimed. "How?"

"Murdered!" cried the big-framed man as he strode forward. "Murdered by one of your thieving Indians! I knew something like this would happen ever since you brought the beggars here to work."

"The Indians do not—," John began, and then he stopped as Miss Baynes exclaimed:

"Father!"

"How was he killed?" asked Twilight quietly.

"We don't know," answered the young woman, and then the tears came to her eyes. But she shook them away with a resolute jerk of her head and went on calmly:

"Paquette went to the pens early this morning, as usual, and found him there, near the little shanty. He did not touch

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him, he says, and came back at once to tell us. We have not seen him."

"He might not be dead," offered the young man, whom John knew to be Stritt.

"He dead!" declared Paquette with a shiver. "Me touch him with the foot and he hard like ice."

For the first time Myra Baynes broke down. Frankly, openly, the tears and the sobs came. John, who remembered what Ball had said of his and his wife's attitude toward the girl, turned away. Baynes, anger and sorrow and resentment and pity struggling grotesquely for possession of the great, red, choleric countenance, drew his daughter to him, one arm around her shoulders. As he looked over her head at John and Twilight, standing at the foot of the steps, the irascible side of his nature seemed suddenly to triumph and he shook his free fist in Reid's face.

"They should be driven out of the country, every last thieving, murdering one of them!" he cried. "They've tried to steal our foxes and now they've killed one of our people. I knew this was coming, but it won't happen again. I'll see that they are driven out if I have to do it myself."

"If an Indian were here last night he would leave tracks!" exclaimed John in hot defense of his friends. "And I'll guarantee you can't find an Indian's track on the island, or lake, either, for that matter. From what Mr. Ball told me of conditions here, it is not necessary to leave the island to find the man who killed him."

"You mean to accuse me!" bellowed Baynes.

He dropped his arm from Myra's shoulders and strode to the head of the steps.

"I am accusing no one. Mr. Ball told me he had trouble here and that one man threatened to kill him."

"Ball always thought some one was after him," interposed Stritt. "But Indians or any one else, this is a case for the police and the quicker we do something the better."

"You never get the police," said Paquette, pointing to the sun which had just risen above the tops of the spruce in the center of the island. "That eat up the trail quick these days."

"For one, I don't care whether we get them or not!" exclaimed Baynes. "The police won't do anything if they do come. If no one will help me, I'll go after those red devils alone, and I won't leave anything for the police to do."

"They would certainly have a case against you," interrupted Stritt, "and we wouldn't be any the wiser as to how Ball was killed. At least we can make an effort to notify the authorities."

"And while we were waiting for them the Indians would steal all our foxes!" exploded Baynes wrathfully.

Myra had gained control of herself and now stepped forward to her father's side.

"You two have lived here longer than we have and know the country," she began, addressing John and Twilight Jack. "Will it be possible, by starting at once, to get out to the railroad, wire to Port Arthur, wait for the police and then get back here?"

John turned to his friend in deference to the trapper's greater experience and knowledge.

"You might and you might not," Twilight answered. "If this keeps up there ain't any chance. But it's early in April and a change in the weather might tighten things up so there would be ten days of good traveling."

"Then the chances are against getting in the police?"

Twilight nodded.

"But we ought to send for them," declared Stritt. "A man has been killed here on the island and it is our duty to notify the authorities."

"Now listen," commanded Miss Baynes. "Mr. Ball has been killed. We are a long way from civilization and if it were possible to get the police it would be a week before they could reach here. In the meantime it is our duty, not only to the memory of Mr. Ball and to society but to ourselves, to do what we can to learn who killed him and to hold them for the authorities."

"You'll never find out which one did it," interrupted Baynes. "The only way to do is to wipe out the whole tribe."

"Father," said Myra soothingly, laying a hand on his arm. "Listen to what I have to say. The situation is more serious than you seem to think. Mr. Ball was killed on this island. So far as we know there was no one else here last night. All of us are, in a sense, implicated. None of us has the right to take part even in an investigation."

"You!" cried Baynes, staring at his daughter, the veins in his face turning blue.

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"Don't be absurd!" she retorted sharply. "I don't think any one on the island had anything to do with it. I know you didn't, father. But, in a sense, we are all subject to suspicion. Luckily, however, Mr. Reid and his friend came at the right time. They were not here last night. They know nothing of what has happened. They can go over the ground with open minds and make out a report for the authorities when they do get here."

"No!" cried Baynes. "I won't stand for Reid having anything to do with such an investigation. If he found Indian tracks he'd cover them up."

"I don't see why you and your father and I can not gather all the available evidence and write out a report, one all three of us can sign," suggested Stritt.

"Of course," agreed Baynes. "This is our affair."

Twilight had turned his back upon those on the veranda when Myra was first interrupted by her father. Now he grasped John Reid's arm and whispered:

"Come on, lad. We can get back before it gets soft."

John hesitated. Myra had overheard the trapper and involuntarily she stretched forth a hand as though to detain the two visitors. She looked with a quick, terror-inspired appeal from one to the other.

"Don't go!" she cried. "Don't you see?" and she whirled to face her father and Stritt. "Mr. Ball told Mr. Reid that some one here had threatened his life. Both Paquette and Geggie heard you quarreling with him last night. I know you didn't do this, dad, but don't you see?" and the terror returned to her eyes. "Don't you see that unless there is an impartial investigation there will always be doubt. You'll recognize that when the excitement is over. Some one else must do this."

Baynes, speaking calmly for the first time since the arrival of John Reid and his friend, turned and faced the two on the ground before him.

"Did Ball tell you that?" he asked.

"He did," answered John readily.

"And did he say who made this threat?"

There was not a sound, nor was an eye turned from John's face as, for an instant, he hesitated.

"He did," came the answer at last.

"That's nonsense," interrupted Stritt. "Ball has been seeing things ever since he came. Why should any one on the island kill him?"

John turned and faced the young man on the veranda for the first time. He saw very much the type Ball had described. There was nothing evil, even weak, in the good-looking face. He was thoroughly at his ease now that the first excitement had passed. There was nothing about his appearance or manner that would lead one to believe that he could have anything to do with the taking of another's life.

And yet as John looked he remembered the blunt, honest, brave little man who had visited his cabin the day before. Every detail of the conversation came to him.

"He's betting his last twenty thousand dollars against all Baynes owns."

"Mr. Ball came to my cabin yesterday," John declared. "He said something was wrong over here and he wanted me to come over and help him find out what it was. He said there had been a threat to kill him. He said there was trouble. I refused to come. He finally made his plea so strong that I could no longer refuse, and I promised to bring Twilight Jack over this morning. I would not have done even that had there not been something in his manner that showed he was holding things back, that he was not telling me all he knew. He was not afraid for himself but for others. That's all I know except that his statements seem to have been borne out by facts."

John stopped, suddenly conscious that he had said much more than he had intended. He glanced quickly at Myra, fearing that his statement might have hurt her, that she would now recoil from him. But he was mistaken in the girl.

"That proves my point," she asserted bravely. "It is not for us to act but for Mr. Reid and his friend. You see it now, father?"

Baynes had been staring at John while the young man was speaking. His belligerence seemed to have vanished absolutely. He nodded and Myra turned to Stritt inquiringly.

"Of course," answered the young man. "It makes no difference to me. Any way, just so we get the facts."

"And you will?" cried Myra, turning quickly to John and Twilight. "You will do it?"

Twilight was silent. John hesitated. He had suddenly revolted against the whole

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affair, against Baynes and Stritt and their evasions and unwillingness to permit an outside investigation. But before the expression of confidence, of hope, in the girl's face he was powerless.

Suddenly he felt himself unworthy, because of his brief hesitation, of even aiding her. She had met a difficult situation with less fear and with better, clearer judgment than either of the two men beside her. Her faith in her father was unmistakable, and yet she recognized that only through an impartial, thorough inquiry could he be absolved of all suspicion.

"I will be glad to do what I can to help you, Miss Baynes," John said, wholly unconscious that he was offering his services to her alone. "I never had anything to do with such a case before, but Twilight has. You couldn't get a better man than Twilight, and," he turned inquiringly to his friend and received an almost imperceptible nod in reply, "we will take charge."

"Then let's get started down to the pens and see what there is to be seen," said Baynes as he stepped down from the veranda.

"Just a minute," and Twilight thrust himself into the conversation for the first time. His tone was sharp, so sharp even John glanced quickly at him.

"You asked us to take hold of this thing," continued the trapper. "We will, provided we're given full charge. If we want help we'll ask for it. But it's to be understood that we do as we please."

"You're not going down there alone!" protested Baynes angrily.

"Or I'm not going at all."

"I won't have strangers fooling around the pens, especially at this time of the year," the fox-farm head exploded. "It would be disastrous."

"Father," protested Myra as she saw Twilight turn in disgust toward the trail by which he had come. "Can't you realize that something more important than foxes is concerned in this? And they'll be careful and not disturb them more than is necessary."

"Oh, very well. Go ahead and ruin everything. Everything's ruined anyhow."

He turned toward the door of the house but stopped when Twilight spoke.

"All right. I just wanted it understood that we are to do this thing as we think's right, John and me. Now I'm going to look over the ground down there before it gets too soft. I'll take Paquette with me. John, you stay here and let these folks tell you what they know about Ball's being killed, when they saw him last and all that. I've got to hurry before the sun hits that trail and softens all the prints."

HE AND the Frenchman started across the clearing toward the brush on the east side, where the beginning of the trail leading along the shore of the bay could be seen. As he disappeared the others turned to John.

Somehow the young man felt that they who a moment before had been so recalcitrant were looking to him for orders. For the first time, too, the responsibility he had accepted struck him with its full force. A life had been taken and a life might depend upon what he was to do.

Far from civilization, in this little colony of white people set down in a great wilderness, isolated so completely by breaking trails and rotting ice, he found himself acting as investigator and judge. The law was far away except as it rested in him to establish law and justice there on the island. The sublimity of this aspect of the situation awed him for an instant and then he squared his shoulders to meet it.

"We may as well go inside and sit down," he began. "I'll listen to your accounts of the case, all you know, and then I'll write it out and read it to you. If it is satisfactory, each can sign his statement, with the others to act as witnesses."

Myra led the way into the living-room and arranged chairs about the big table in the center. She brought paper and a fountain pen and placed them at the head and indicated that John was to sit there.

"We'll begin with you, Mr. Baynes," said John when all were seated.

With questions from John, suggestions from Myra and Stritt, the statement of the head of the fox-farm was finally transcribed, approved and signed.

Myra's turn came next and then Stritt's.

For a moment the two young men sat facing each other. That each was studying the other was clearly evident, though behind Stritt's steady stare was something more than a mere gaging of the ethnologist. Then he suddenly straightened in his chair and began:

"I was at the pens last night."

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"You!" exclaimed Myra.

"Yes," was the defiant answer. "I was there. I'd be a fool not to say that I was with that man down there seeing my tracks. I went because Ball went, but," he added hastily, "I never saw him, not from the time he took the trail here at the clearing."

In detail John took down the story and finally it, like the others, had been approved and signed.

"Now," said John as he arose, "I'll keep these and, of course, will call upon you if anything develops that necessitates enlarging upon any features of your statements."

There was a knock at the door and Myra arose and threw it open to see Twilight standing there.

"Are you through?" he asked of John.

"Yes."

"Then come out here. I want to talk to you a minute."

He turned down the steps and John followed. Something in the trapper's manner held the others in their seats. That he had found something down there at the scene of death, that death of which they had all testified they knew nothing, was clearly evident in his manner. Myra, frightened, looked quickly from Stritt to her father and then threw herself down into a chair and began to sob.

Baynes, seeming to realize the seriousness of the case for the first time, apparently aware at last that Ball was dead, had been murdered, sat drumming unconsciously on the table with his fingers. Only Stritt was self-possessed.

"There's Paquette," he said. "I'll have him get some breakfast for us."

Outside Twilight led the way across the clearing to the building known as the men's camp and in which Ball and Stritt had slept with Paquette and Geggie, the foreman.

"What did you find out?" asked John as the trapper lifted the latch and pushed open the door.

"Several things, lad," was the answer. "But I thought I'd bring you over here and listen to what they have to say first. Paquette says we can come in here. It's only a sleeping camp."

They entered a large room which served evidently as a common living-place, while on two sides doors opened into small bedrooms. Twilight drew a bench up to a table beneath a window.

"Now tell what they said."

"I'll read what they have signed," answered John, and he began with Myra's statement.

"The morning of April third, Mr. Ball left soon after breakfast and went across the lake. He came back at noon and did not say where he had been. He talked with me most of the afternoon but said very little about the fox-farm. After supper I heard him and father talking loudly about it. Mr. Ball, I knew, was angry because father would not let him visit the pens. He accused father of hiding things or keeping things back and finally said he intended to see the pens, 'orders or no orders.'

"Mr. Ball went to the men's camp and father came into the house. He sat and read until dark, when Geggie started to town with the mail. A little later father went out, saying he was going to the pens. He was gone about an hour. When he came in we sat and talked for a few minutes and then both of us went to bed. I was wakened in the morning by Paquette pounding on the door and saying that Mr. Ball was dead."

"Nothing in that," commented Twilight.

"No, but here's Baynes!"

"Ball came to me after supper on the night of April third and said he was going to make a last demand to be allowed to visit the pens. I refused it and he made charges, wholly baseless, that I was hiding something from him which he, as a stockholder in the farm, was entitled to know.

"I lost my temper and told him that he should have remained in the States and that I did not want to be hampered in my efforts to make a success of the venture by his prying around. I explained again that it might prove disastrous for him to appear at the pens at a time when the litters were expected. He declared he would see the pens anyhow, orders or no orders, and went off to the men's camp. That is the last time I ever saw him.

"At dark, or soon afterward, I went to the pens. Attempts have been made to steal our foxes and I suspected something that night. Paquette had just finished feeding the animals and I sent him to the house to help my daughter in the kitchen and to get up his wood and water for the night. I told him he need not return as I would remain on watch as long as I thought it necessary.

"I waited in the door of the shanty beside

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the main entrance to the pens for an hour and then returned to the house. I did not see any one all the time I was there nor hear any one. I left because it occurred to me that no one would attempt to steal foxes on a night when the snow was soft and it would be impossible to move without leaving a track.

"At the house I talked for a while with my daughter and was in bed at ten o'clock. I slept until Paquette wakened us in the morning."

Twilight stared at John for a moment as though thinking over what he had just heard. Then he said suddenly:

"Read the young lad's."

John began:

"After supper I talked for a short time with Miss Baynes and then went over to the men's camp and sat down to read. It was still warm and the door was open and I heard the voices of Ball and Baynes on the veranda of the Baynes cabin. Both appeared to be angry but I could not hear their words. At last I saw Ball coming toward the men's camp and I went into my room, lit a lamp and lay down on my bunk to read.

"I heard Ball on the steps and, from the sounds, he evidently sat down there. I did not hear him go away for a long time. Finally he stepped down. I put out my light, went into the main room and across to the window. I was in my stocking feet. I saw Baynes going across the clearing toward the trail to the pens. Then I saw Ball move out from the shadow of the men's camp and follow him. I went into my own room, put on my shoes and started after them. I went on down the trail, very slowly, listening and watching, for I knew Baynes would object to Ball being at the pens.

"It was half an hour later, I went so carefully, before I arrived at the shanty at the main gate. There was no one there. I waited a moment and then turned back up the trail to the clearing. I returned to the men's camp, went into my roon and to bed.

"From the time I saw Ball disappear on the trail to the pens I did not see him again, nor did I see any one else. Where they were I have no way of knowing."

John laid down the last sheet of paper and glanced at Twilight Jack.

"Of course," he said, "I have got to get Paquette's statement. I'll do that now."

"No," answered the trapper absently. "I've done that."

"What did you find out?" asked John.

"I don't know exactly. Maybe a lot of things, though I can't tell yet. There's only one thing I did learn, lad, that I'm sure of, and that is that both Baynes and Stritt are lying."

"Lying!"

"Didn't they both claim in their statements that they didn't see anybody else at the pens last night?"

"Yes," replied John. "I read that."

"Well, their tracks show that they were down there together, that they saw each other and that Stritt saw Ball's body lying there if not more."

"You don't mean," demanded John in sudden horror, "that you think Baynes and Stritt killed Ball?"

"I'm not thinking yet. There's too many other funny things about this. For besides Stritt and Baynes there were two other folks on the island last night and they were there at the pens at about the same time Ball was."

CHAPTER IV

TWILIGHT FINDS A MOTIVE

"TWO others on the island!"

John found himself only able to repeat the startling information. Then, as the meaning of it sifted through the maze of new and complicating features, his face brightened. His first sane thought was of Myra. Strangers on the island meant that strangers had killed Ball. This, in turn, meant that her father would be freed even of suspicion.

"Then we have only to find these two men and we'll have the ones who killed Ball!" he exclaimed.

"I've found one of them and I don't think he had anything to do with it. It was Tom Geggie, the foreman here. He started to town last night when it was still soft. Baynes sent him out on his regular trip for the mail. He was driving the dogs. Out on the lake he found he didn't have any chewing tobacco and he came back across the south end of the island to the pens and borrowed a plug of Paquette's. Then he went on. Paquette told me that and I saw his tracks."

"And that was before Baynes or Stritt were down there, or Ball either," commented John excitedly. "But who was the other man?"

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'It wasn't a man."

"Not a man!"

"No, it was a woman."

John's elation vanished instantly in the face of this new and overwhelming information. Myra Baynes was the only woman within many miles. The young man could only stare at his friend.

"It was a woman because she had small feet and I found where her skirts dragged in the deep snow beyond the pens. She went out after Geggie did."

"And it was—" John began, and then he ended in a whisper: "Was it Miss Baynes?"

"I don't know, lad," replied Twilight Jack. "She wore Indian moccasins, and Miss Baynes had on Indian moccasins this morning. There is no sign of where she went out on the lake for she didn't leave any tracks on the hard going. She was there just before it began to freeze in the soft snow in the bush, and she left when the snow on the lake was frozen hard."

"And was she there with Geggie?"

"She went in after Geggie had gone for his chew of tobacco. I can't tell whether they were there at exactly the same time or not."

John stared out of the window for a moment. He was too stunned even to think in the face of this bit of evidence, coming, as it did, on top of the many conflicting things they had discovered. Baynes lying! Stritt lying! He refused to go on. Myra could not have lied to him when she gave her statement. Almost frantically he tore himself away from the thought and turned to Twilight.

"How do you know Baynes and Stritt were not telling the truth?" he asked.

"You mind last night it stayed cloudy until after nine o'clock? Then it cleared off and the wind died down and it began to freeze. That meant that all those goings on were before half-past nine or ten. They're telling the truth that far. They were all back here and in bed by ten o'clock, just as they said. That is, the two men were."

"You don't mean to say that Miss Baynes was not?" John demanded.

"I'm only saying what I know. That's the only way to go at this thing. I don't know who made those moccasin tracks, and I'm not saying anything about them.

"But here's how Baynes lied. He says he sent Paquette back to help his daughter wash dishes. That's what Paquette says. I can't find yet where Paquette lied and I think we can count on him. I don't know what Baynes did there after Paquette left. It was all beaten down around the shanty and the gate to the pens and you couldn't make nothing of the tracks.

"But," and Twilight laid both hands flat on the table and faced John, "Baynes said he didn't see any one there. But he started back to the house ahead of Stritt, on that narrow trail, and he got to the clearing here after Stritt did. He walked all the way. Stritt ran most of the way. Stritt started last. He got here first. Neither one left the trail, except Stritt where he stepped off, running on the turns. Two men can't do that on a narrow trail even in the dark without seeing each other."

"But why should they lie about it?" demanded John. Then, his mind suddenly grasping the point, he hurried on:

"And both lied! Their stories joined!"

"Yes, both lied," agreed Twilight. "And here's where Stritt lied again. He said he went down there and waited around and didn't see any one and then came back and went to bed. But he didn't tell how he came back. I saw by his tracks he ran. You can see down there on the trail yet, his hobnail boots digging deep six feet apart.

"But here's what Paquette told me. He said that after he'd finished washing dishes he went down to the water-hole for water. While he was bending over he thought he heard a noise down at the pens, which would be just across the bay from him. It sounded like some one yelled kind of low, he said. He waited and didn't hear it again so he thought he hadn't heard it at all and went back to the house.

"When he'd finished his work he came over here and sat down in the doorway for a smoke before going to bed. After a while he heard some one running on the trail and he stepped inside the door to watch. Then Stritt came out of the brush full speed, running across to the door there and into this room and right across to his bedroom. He got into bed without lighting a light. Paquette says he could hear him lying there breathing hard from his run for quite a while. Then Paquette went to bed and he didn't see anything more until he went to the pens early this morning and found Ball lying dead beside the shanty."

John, deep in speculation, did not comment when Twilight had finished. Clues without end, clues that merely pointed a

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trail but did not finish it. Lies, damning bits of action, motives—his mind refused to grasp the infinite, contradictory pieces of evidence. Always his thoughts returned to the moccasin tracks leading to the pens from the south and the skirt dragging in the snow, and suddenly he sickened of the whole business. In despair he turned to Twilight.

"What's the use, Jack!" he exclaimed. "It's a dirty mess from start to finish. We can never get anything out of this tangle, and—and—I don't want to go on with it."

"Easy, lad," admonished the trapper quietly. "You're just upset, is all. We said we'd do this and we ain't through yet. It looks tangled now but sooner or later something is going to come up that will point straight toward the North Pole. Nobody ever did anything in the woods yet without making one mistake, no matter how careful he planned, and there's always some one little thing that fastens his crime on him as tight as a porky quill in a dog's nose. All we've got to do is to find that one little thing."

John, unaffected by his friend's words, continued to stare despondently out of the window. Unaccountably there had come to him the conviction that Mary Baynes knew much more of the affair than she had told, that she even knew who had killed Ball and that, because her father was implicated, she was trying to cover it up. He recalled her insistence that outsiders investigate the case; recalled her genuine sorrow because of the death of her friend; recalled the eyes which had told him more plainly than words or actions that she was innocent. And yet the doubt persisted. Twilight ended his thoughts by rising suddenly.

"Come on over to the Baynes cabin with me," the trapper said as he walked toward the door. "I want to ask him a few questions. We'll probably learn something from what he says."

On their way across the clearing they passed Stritt going to the men's camp. Paquette was splitting wood.

"We can talk to the old fellow and his girl alone," Twilight whispered.

THEY were admitted by Myra. Baynes sat at the table, staring out of a window. He glanced up but did not speak, only looked closely at Twilight and John as they took chairs across from him.

"How many foxes have you on this farm?" Twilight began abruptly.

Baynes stared hard at the trapper and then said:

"Six pairs."

"Five besides those forty-thousand-dollar ones?"

"Yes. Black Hector and his mate cost forty thousand dollars. We paid ten thousand dollars for another pair and the rest are inferior stock, the kind that cost from fifteen hundred to twenty-five hundred dollars a pair."

"What makes one worth more than another?"

"They are domestic foxes, bred and rebred until they are practically certain producers of black foxes."

"You know," explained Myra, "a black fox is no different than a red except in his coat. A litter was found in Labrador in which there were red, cross and black foxes, all with the same father and mother. By breeding only the black ones, the Prince Edward Island farmers were able to produce strains that are practically certain to breed true to type. That's why Black Hector and his mate are so valuable."

"And the ten-thousand-dollar pair ain't quite so certain?" asked Twilight.

"Yes," replied Myra, taking the replies upon herself. "That is what is believed. But with this particular pair father thought he was getting a bargain. He purchased them against the wishes of Mr. Ball and Mr. Stritt, the other stockholders, because it took almost the last money in the treasury. They believed we should get along with the four inferior pairs, breeding them into pure stock ourselves, and depending upon Black Hector and his mate for dividends.

"But father had information that this ten-thousand-dollar pair was far better than believed and that it was an excellent buy. He guaranteed they would breed pure. Outwardly, they appear as good as Back Hector, but you can't tell until you see the pups, of course."

Baynes watched his daughter closely as she spoke. Once he frowned but he did not interrupt.

"Have any foxes been stolen?" Twilight asked sharply.

Baynes started and turned quickly to face the trapper. For a brief instant he hesitated and then he answered shortly:

"No."

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Twilight held the older man's gaze steadily, his gray eyes seeming to search for something behind the words. Then he asked:

"You still have six pairs?"

"We still have the six pairs, though in the coming week we should have several more."

Baynes paused a moment and then exploded angrily:

"But there have been attempts to steal them. People have come here in the island in the night, people," and he turned and faced John, "who wore moccasins, Indian moccasins. I have seen their tracks, and once I know I kept them from stealing. That is why I went to the pens last night. I felt that an attempt would be made.

"It's been driving me crazy, this business. I can't sleep nights thinking of what it would mean to have those red devils get hold of Black Hector and his mate. It's horrible, the idea. It isn't the money so much. But they would only kill and skin them and sell their hides for a few hundred dollars, and that pair, if they live, will make a fortune."

"And all six pairs are in those little pens inside the big pens?" asked Twilight calmly. He refused to be affected in any way by the other's outburst.

"Yes."

"Well," and Twilight did not take his eyes from Baynes's face, "your ten-thousand-dollar ones are gone."

John started and glanced quickly at Myra and her father. And as he did so, in the face of this news of a theft, he was conscious that it was news only to him. Myra shrank back more in fear than in surprise. Baynes's eyes sought his daughter's and both Twilight and John caught a warning in their expression.

But this was over in an instant, in a time so short that in Baynes's immediate outburst and in Myra's quick comment it was almost forgotten.

"Stolen!" cried the girl.

"Stolen by those thieving Indians!" shouted her father. "That explains Ball's death. He was there, and he tried to prevent it, and they killed him. Now," and he turned upon Reid threateningly, "will you believe me? Now will you admit that those pets of yours are not saints?"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Twilight roughly. "I'm not through yet."

The three whirled to face him, Baynes and Myra as conscious as John that something more important was coming.

"I didn't tell it all," said Twilight. "Black Hector and his mate are gone, too."

CHAPTER V

STRITT OR BAYNES?

IF JOHN and Twilight had gained the idea that the disappearance of the ten thousand dollars was not news to Myra and her father, they had no doubt as to the effect caused by the trapper's final statement.

For a time neither moved a muscle. Only their eyes widened in astonishment so unmistakable that John, at least, forgot the impression that they had known perfectly there were only five pairs of foxes in the big pen.

Myra was the first to recover. Suddenly she leaned across the table and looked searchingly at Twilight.

"Do you mean?" she demanded tensely, "that Black Hector has been stolen?"

"I don't know whether he has been stolen," answered Twilight. "He isn't there, is all, not in the ——"

"Stolen!" came in a roar from Baynes, who seemed to have regained the power of speech through the words of the others. "Of course he's stolen. Fifty thousand dollars gone! Half the capital invested here!"

He glared at Twilight and John for all the world as if they alone were responsible. His face was congested, his great frame was held back erectly from the table upon which he had been leaning. His mouth was tightly compressed, as if the hot, wild words were fighting just back of his lips, each striving to be the first to break out. And, when they did come, it was as if the strongest had won in the struggle.

"Ruin! Absolute, complete ruin! I'm wrecked! I'm done for! I've lived night and day with this thing for a year, working, planning, doing all I could to make of this the big success it should be.

"And it's you!" he exploded, turning upon John. "It's you and your Indians that have done it! If you hadn't brought the thieves here to work they might have kept away, instead of trying to wreck the place because I wouldn't submit to their beggarly demands. It's the Indians that have done

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it, come in here in the night and stolen a fortune. It's the Indians who killed Ball, probably while Ball was trying to defend his property, and mine. It's the Indians——"

Suddenly he stopped. His great, strong frame, his square, resolute, massive face, had been those of a big man, a man accustomed to success because he had earned success, because he could always win success. The force, the character, the stubborn, indomitable nature of the man, had showed even through the petulence of his outburst.

But as the words stopped, as John and the others looked, all the force and decision and strength seemed to have gone from him. His body wilted as did his spirit. His eyes, which had glared fearlessly and belligerently at John, suddenly shifted uneasily to the table before him.

The contrast was pitiful, so completely and so quickly did he appear to be broken. John, much as he disliked the man, felt only compassion as he watched the trembling fingers pawing at a magazine on the table. Twilight, if he felt pity or contempt, did not show it. Never since he had spoken had he taken his eyes from Baynes's face, except for quick glances at Myra. When he saw that the big man was not going to speak again he broke the silence.

"You knew Geggie was at the pens last night, didn't you?" he asked sharply.

"Yes," answered Baynes in a low, colorless tone. "Paquette told me he came for a plug of tobacco."

"Don't you suppose Geggie took Black Hector and his mate?"

The trapper's question roused the big man only slightly.

"Nonsense!" he replied. "That was before I went there. Black Hector was in his pen when I left."

"And the other two?" Twilight shot at him instantly.

"Yes, the other pair."

"Look here, Mr. Baynes," and Twilight leaned across the table to catch and hold the other's eyes, "I have been all around those pens. I have seen the track of everyone who was near them last night up to and right after the time Ball was killed. I know every person who was there, who was on this island yesterday or last night until ten o'clock. And I know no one was there after that time."

He paused a moment to let his meaning sink in. John glanced uneasily at the speaker and then at Myra. For the second time he was sickened by the entire affair and the part he had agreed to play in it. He knew what Twilight would say next, what the effect would be on Myra, and he turned away as one might from the electric chair when the executioner places his hand on the switch.

"I know, too," Twilight continued, "that there was not an Indian on the island last night. I made sure of that. Whoever killed Ball, and whoever stole the four foxes, was some one here on the island. That means it was Paquette, Geggie, Stritt or yourself."

It was brutal, John thought, but despite this aspect of it he felt only relief because he knew that Twilight, for some reason, chose not to mention his knowledge that a woman had also been at the scene of the murder.

Baynes, suddenly interested, leaned across the table and stared at Twilight.

"Is that right?" he demanded. "Are you sure of that?"

"Certain sure," answered Twilight emphatically.

Baynes drew back, half turned in his chair so that he faced the window and began drumming on the table with the fingers of his right hand. Then he spoke, almost in a whisper:

"Stritt! Stritt! It couldn't be any one else."

"And you think Geggie was in with him and took the foxes away?" Twilight shot at him instantly.

Half hopelessly, half in terror, Baynes turned to face the trapper. His body sagged, his facial muscles relaxed as they had in the midst of his outburst against John. His hands trembled. His eyes shifted uneasily to the window. Suddenly he arose and rushed out of the door, slamming it behind him. In a moment the others saw him approach the men's camp, where Stritt was sitting on the steps. They saw Baynes stop and speak, and then Stritt arose and both went inside.

John looked questioningly at Twilight and Myra saw him. For the first time the girl seemed to lose her self-possession completely. Before she could restrain them, the tears rolled from her eyes, her lips trembled, and then she arose quickly and fled into her own room, closing the door behind her.

In helpless pity John stared after her.

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Not since he had arrived at the island had its conflicting mysteries been more repulsive. He had a quick desire to rush into Myra's room, take her in his arms and bear her away, away from the island, away to his own cabin, where she would be safe. So strong was the idea he jumped from his chair unconsciously and took one step toward the door. Then Twilight's calm voice brought him back to reality.

"We'll go over and get Baynes and Stritt to help us carry Ball up to the house," the trapper said as he went out of the door. "I've started Paquette to digging a grave and making a coffin."

AT THE men's camp they found Baynes his old, confident, blustering self. He and Stritt were standing in the middle of the room. The younger man was as cool as he had been ever since a few minutes after the arrival of John and Twilight that morning, and his glance as the two entered was only calmly inquisitive.

"If you men'll help us, we'll get the body and bring it up here," Twilight said. "I've told Paquette to start digging a grave on the knoll at the north end of the island and he'll have it done by the time we're ready to bury him."

"What do you mean, arranging such things?" demanded Baynes wrathfully. "That, at least, is our affair."

"You don't seem to be doing anything about it, and the man has got to be buried," was the calm reply.

"But Ball was a man of means, of family. His relatives will never stand for his being buried here. We must take him out."

"You can do that, after the ice is gone," said the trapper indifferently. "But you can't keep him till then, so the only thing to do is to stick him in the ground until you can get him out."

As he spoke he went into one of the rooms and picked up a blanket from the bed. With this on his arm he led the way to the door.

"Come on," he said as he went out, and he did not even turn to see if he were followed.

The others did follow, John readily, of course, Stritt unconcernedly, Baynes grumbling to himself. It was John's first journey down the trail to the pens and he pressed on eagerly after Twilight. Soon Baynes and Stritt were left behind, plodding slowly in the now soft and slippery trail.

"What do you think of it, Jack?" he asked in a whisper when they were far enough ahead of the others.

"There's too much to think about to do any thinking," was the reply. "Every one of these people seems to be trying to cover up something. Every one seems to be in cahoots with every one else, and each one seems to be afraid of the rest. No one seems to be telling the truth, and each one seems to be afraid some one will tell it."

"But Stritt and Baynes! They must be in some sort of a deal together! Their stories, their actions, even their lies, point to it. Look how Baynes changed from a nervous wreck to his old self as soon as he had been with Stritt a minute."

"You can fix up any kind of a story you want to from what they did and what they said they did and the lies they've told and the way they act," was the calm reply.

"But there are the motives, Twilight," protested John. "See what Ball suspected, what he feared. It sounded ridiculous, but Ball was killed. He said Stritt is after all Baynes owns, that Stritt practically admitted it. Baynes, we know, isn't acting on the square and hasn't been. It is only breeding-time that strangers may do harm around a pen. I've read that. Now it wouldn't make a bit of difference. And Baynes knew that ten thousand-dollar pair was gone. He and Myra both knew it. And Baynes was there and Stritt was there. It's as clear as daylight to me. They both had the motive, and they were both at the pens."

"Maybe so," agreed Twilight Jack. "It's got me fussed up, all the things they say and do. But it ain't motives I'm looking for. Some folks might be satisfied with convicting a man on what they think goes on in his head, but not me. There's always enough sign left around, if you can only find it, to point to the right man every time. And when you've got it you know it's the truth. It's what a man did, and not what he or some one else might have planned to do."

"Then you're going to keep on looking?"

"Sure. I tried to bother old Baynes up there at his house just for the fun of it. What I'm looking for is a sure sign of his having done something, not his own story of it."

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CHAPTER VI

STRITT MAKES ANOTHER THREAT

EXCEPT when Paquette had timorously poked Ball's body with his toe to find him "hard like ice," the murdered man had not been touched. His thick, short little body lay sprawled on the hard-packed snow just to one side of the door of the shanty which had been built opposite the main gate of the great outer pen. His face was turned toward the sky, showing a narrow, bluish welt across one temple and down the cheek.

Twilight had brought an ax from the woodpile near the men's camp and, throwing the blanket down beside the body, went immediately into the brush. John was alone when Baynes and Stritt arrived. He watched them as they came around the corner of the shanty for, if they had told the truth, it would be the first time they had seen Ball since he was at the other end of the island the night before.

Stritt's expression and manner did not change in the least. He looked at the body for an instant, curiously, with a certain amount of interest, and then turned at once toward the fox pens, which he claimed never to have seen in daylight. John found himself resentful of the self-possession of this young man who, he knew, had lied about his actions of the night before. In his indignation he forgot Baynes entirely until he heard a low exclamation and turned to see him standing over the body of the man who had been his business associate and friend.

For the first time since John had known him, Baynes displayed an attractive trait. He did not sob, did not break down, but his great, red face was twisted in genuine anguish, and his shoulders were bent beneath what was a real sorrow. He still stood thus when Twilight returned with two spruce poles and began to build a stretcher.

"All right," he said when he had finished his task. "We can each take a corner and get along all right."

Stritt returned from the gate to the pens, where he had been watching the black noses that were occasionally thrust out of the little houses in the smaller pens, and took his place.

Silently all four made their difficult way up the trail to the clearing. The load was not heavy, divided among the four of them, but the trail was loose, wet snow a foot and a half deep, continually breaking off at the edges where they were compelled to walk. Though the pounds that each man carried were not many, there was a weight of tragedy that dragged heavily on the poles, and it was with relief that the burden was deposited on the floor of the men's camp.

"I'll get Myra and a Bible," said Baynes quietly as he turned to the door.

When they arrived the body was again taken up and carried through the brush at the north end of the clearing to the place where Paquette had dug a shallow grave in the frozen ground. He had made a rough box, and in this the body was placed and set in the slight depression.

"That's deep enough for now," said Twilight in a matter-of-fact tone. "The ice in the lakes will be gone before much of the frost is out of the ground here."

Unconsciously he had assumed entire charge of the affair and as he finished speaking he looked inquiringly at Myra as if indicating that the girl might begin her share of the brief ceremony.

Myra started bravely enough. Quite calmly she opened the book. But when she had found the place selected no words came. John, who stood at her side, saw her falter and grasped the Bible just as it fell from her limp hands. She broke into uncontrolled sobs and he led her to her father.

John, too, was in hardly better condition to conduct a service, and yet he felt somehow that none of the others, except Twilight, was fitted to officiate at the burial of the brave little man who lay in the pine box. At random he opened the book, and at random he chose several verses in the middle of a page and read them:

"Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.

"To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things;

"Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness;

"Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked;

"Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths.

"To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words;

"Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God.

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"For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead.

"None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life.

"That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous.

"For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it.

"But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it."

John stopped because he had reached the end of the chapter. Suddenly, as a picture is flashed upon a screen, he knew what he had read. In consternation he glanced up at the others.

"For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead."

Each verse came to him instantly, graphically, and yet as, submerged in his shame, he looked at the others, he saw that none seemed to have grasped what he had read. Even Stritt stood across the grave from him, his head bowed, his hands behind his back.

In his relief John suggested that they join in saying the Lord's Prayer. Only Myra did not begin with him. She still clung to her father, her sobs barely audible but her shoulders shaking convulsively.

They began bravely. Then Baynes hesitated and dropped out. John followed, at a loss for the next word. Stritt continued steadily until his memory failed in the middle of a sentence. Twilight alone, slowly, solemnly, recited on to the end.

Immediately they turned away. Baynes, leading Myra, went first, John and Stritt fell in behind them, leaving Twilight and Paquette at the grave. As John walked away he heard the clods clattering upon the pine box. The sound seemed to affect Stritt as strongly as it did him, and they walked to the men's camp in silence.

ONCE inside, however, Stritt's manner changed instantly. He stepped briskly across the living-room to his bedroom and returned with a bottle of greenish liquid and two small glasses.

"I don't know whether green is opposed to blue or not," he said lightly as he offered a glass to John, "but I think this stuff is the best antidote for the black butterflies of which I know." He spoke agreeably enough but John was repulsed by the man.

"No, thanks," he said shortly. "I don't need it."

"As you prefer," was the easy rejoinder, and Stritt poured himself a drink and downed it. "Such an occasion demands two," he added, and the second glass followed.

When he had returned from replacing the bottle in his bedroom, being careful to close the door behind him as he came out, he lit a cigaret and stared at John.

"That was quite an appropriate text you chose for your little ceremony on the hill," he said.

John flushed, both from confusion and from anger.

"Hardly just to Miss Baynes, however, I would say," Stritt went on banteringly.

"You can leave Miss Baynes's name out of anything you have to say to me, Stritt," was the heated retort.

"Ho, ho! So you are championing the weak as well as the cause of justice?"

John, unable to explain the cause of a far greater anger than the sneering remark merited, and equally unable to restrain himself, turned furiously upon Stritt.

"None of that from you!" he exclaimed. "None of that or anything else. I know your game, know every move you've planned. I know every lie you've told, and, by ——, before I'm through with this Miss Baynes will know it, too."

"So, so?" said Stritt quietly after a quick scrutiny of the ethnologist. "That's the sort of a cad you are. I thought so. I've always thought so, ever since I heard about your little doings here last Summer. Merely as a matter of interest, I have thought I would look up your history. Now I will surely do so. No man isolates himself in this unspeakable wilderness without a good reason. Even Burns would have a hard time finding you up here.

"And as for Miss Baynes, keep your hands off. Her own kind are here to protect her, and her own kind are the ones who will do it. Keep away from places where you are not wanted."

John, his eyes blinded by a crimson veil, strode forward, his hands outstretched.

"And another thing," added Stritt, shaking a finger calmly in John's face, "you and your friend go on with your little detective game as far as you want to. Have a good time. Get all the footprints and clues your dear little hearts desire. But don't try

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mixing me up in this thing. Understand?"

His tone had suddenly become sharp, commanding. His amiably emphasizing finger was suddenly clenched with the others in a threatening fist.

"Make one move to fasten anything on me and it'll be the last act of your life. Get that?"

John stopped. It was not Stritt's threat. He had scarcely heard that. It was a sudden realization of his own position, of the responsibility he had assumed, of the impossibility of his engaging in a common brawl with one of those under suspicion.

So great was his anger, so slight a hold did he have on himself, he turned and walked quickly out of the door, down the steps and out into the clearing. When his rage had subsided sufficiently for him to realize where he was, he found himself striding rapidly down the trail to the pens. He gave no thought to Baynes's desire that strangers keep away. Stritt's threat and his attitude occupied his attention.

As his anger found a vent through the excessive exertion of walking in the soft trail John remembered what Stritt had said about Myra. For the first time it struck him that his was not a natural life, that perhaps he was not the man for this girl who, even in the midst of suspicion and doubt, continued to become more wonderful, more alluring, in his eyes. Dejection seized him and he strode on. The strong south wind that was blowing cooled his face, and he pressed against it.

John gradually became conscious that something besides the wind was chilling his feverish cheeks. Something damp stroked them, and in sudden fright he opened his eyes to see the face of Myra Baynes wreathed by the intense blue of the April sky. Dimly he realized that he lay in the snow, flat on his back, and, as his thoughts cleared, he knew that his head seemed to be splitting.

"What happened?" he asked in amazement. "What am I doing here?"

Myra ceased stroking his forehead with her wet handkerchief.

"I don't know!" she cried. "I don't know what it means! I just found you lying here on the trail to the pens."

John lifted his right hand to his face and felt the warm blood above his ear and running down his neck. When he took his hand away it was red, and he stared at it in bewilderment. Something in his expression brought a thought to Myra.

"Don't you know what happened, who did it?" she demanded.

"I don't even know what happened."

"You have been attacked, here on the trail, by some one. You were struck on the head and knocked down."

Terror had been gaining control over the girl and she suddenly jumped to her feet.

"What is it?" she demanded frantically. "What does it mean? When is it going to end?"

CHAPTER VII

MYRA FAILS JOHN

JOHN heard some one running and lifted his head to see Paquette and Twilight Jack hurrying down the trail.

"What's happened now?" asked the trapper, and then as he saw the blood on John's face he exclaimed:

"That's just where Ball got it! Who hit you, lad?"

It was not anxiety that forced the question, nor curiosity. After the first exclamation Twilight became ominously calm. He knelt beside his friend, lifted his head, examined the bruised, cut temple and then repeated the question:

"Who hit you, lad?"

"I don't know, Jack," faltered John.

"Don't know! Didn't you see any one?"

"No, I didn't, and the funny part of it is I don't remember being hit. The last I knew I was walking down the trail here. Then I came to and found Miss Baynes bathing my face. I don't remember what happened since I was struck and I don't remember what happened just before."

"We'll get you up to the house first," said Twilight, his eyes never leaving the injured man's.

John felt the doubt in his friend's steady gaze and sought to re-establish himself.

"I don't remember a thing, Twilight, not since I started down here."

"Never mind now. We'll get you up to the house and fix up that cut. Head ache much?"

"Not so badly. Give me a lift and I can walk."

With Paquette on one side, Twilight on the other, Myra running ahead to get warm water and bandages, John made his way to the men's camp. His strength came back

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quickly and his head had only a dull ache. At the steps to the men's camp he sat down and in a moment Myra and Twilight had the blood washed from his face and from the bit of scalp that had been laid open.

"It ought to have a couple of stitches in it to hold that piece down," commented Twilight.

"And it should be washed out with an antiseptic," added Myra. "Wait and I'll get the things at the house."

Ten minutes later Twilight had caught the scalp back in place and a clean, white bandage had been wrapped about John's head.

During the entire affair no one spoke of the attack upon him and none ventured an opinion. Twilight worked silently, the gentle lines about his mouth gone for the first time since his arrival at the island. To him so far the fox-farm tragedy had been a battle of wits, of his wits and his eyes and his woodsman's knowledge against those of some one else.

Now that his friend had become the victim of the lust to kill which surely prevailed on the island, it became another matter. When the bandage was adjusted he turned quickly toward the pens, only to stop when he saw both Baynes and Stritt emerge from the trail through the brush.

At the same instant the two men saw John sitting on the steps, saw Myra giving the final adjustment to the bandage about his head. They hurried forward, Baynes in the lead.

"What happened?" demanded the head of the fox-farm excitedly. "Who hit him?"

No one answered. Twilight was watching the two men closely, and Myra, now that the wound had been attended to, again lost control of herself and turned away.

"What happened?" repeated Baynes looking from one to the other.

"Some one tried to lay out the lad the same as they did Ball," said Twilight quietly. "He got the same kind of a blow, in the same place, only it didn't finish him."

"Where did this happen?" asked Stritt.

"It happened right where you just came from, you and him," answered the trapper instantly, and he indicated Baynes.

"You don't mean to say I did it!" cried the older man.

"There is this much about it." stated Twilight deliberately. "He was on the trail to the pens. Paquette and I were filling in the grave and piling rocks on it. Miss Baynes was over at her house and says she started down to the pens and found the lad lying unconscious in the trail. That accounts for everybody. No one was down the trail but you and Stritt."

Baynes and Stritt glanced quickly at each other. Then both started to speak, but Stritt was the quicker.

"I'll explain my actions!" he exclaimed, and his habitual coolness was lacking. "After the burial I thought I would stroll down to the pens and see the foxes. I've never been allowed down there, but now that strangers are running over the place I didn't see that I would do any harm. I went inside the big pen and walked around. When I came back I saw Mr. Baynes on the trail coming toward me, about halfway down. He said he had just come from the house but would turn around and come back with me."

"Is that right?" Twilight asked Baynes sharply.

"Yes, that is right."

"But you didn't go down just now, Mr. Baynes," replied the trapper decisively. "I saw you go down before John went, right after the funeral. I saw you from where Paquette and I were working at the grave."

"But he told me he had just come from here," Stritt repeated as if in defense of Baynes. The older man did not understand it that way, however.

"You young scoundrel!" he cried, shaking his fist in Stritt's face. "You can't fasten this thing on me. I never saw Reid down there. You were down there when he was attacked, and you had no other business down there."

"But why," protested Stritt, "should I wish to hurt him? I certainly would have no object in trying to kill him."

John, who had been watching Myra's tense, white face, arose from where he had been sitting on the steps and strode into the center of the group.

"This thing has gone far enough," he declared. "Twilight and I have been asked to take charge of the investigation of Mr. Ball's death. We accepted the responsibility. At first that seemed to be the only thing that required an investigation. Our work so far, however, has led us to believe that, as Ball said, 'there is something rotten here.' He was right. First, he was murdered. Then two pairs of foxes, worth half

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the capital stock of the enterprise, are missing. Finally, I am attacked, an attempt is made to kill me.

"Twilight has demonstrated to our satisfaction that, with the exception of Geggie's return to the island to get a plug of tobacco, no outsiders have been here since these various things occurred. The only conclusion is that some one of all of us present here is responsible for Ball's murder, for the theft of the foxes and for the attack on me.

"Twilight and I have gathered considerable evidence already. We will get more. But, until our work is completed, it will be necessary for us to establish bounds. For the safety of those who are innocent, for the protection of all of us, each one of you will be required to keep within limits prescribed by us. I will not make any charges, select any one of you for isolation, but until more definite results have been obtained it will be necessary for each one to stay in bounds."

"It seems to me you are assuming powers and taking action wholly unwarranted," objected Stritt.

John whirled upon him.

"Not another word from you or you will be locked in the root cellar!" he thundered. "I've a good mind to do it anyhow."

He turned and faced the entire group before he went on.

"After the burial and before I was attacked down there on the trail, Stritt threatened my life if I continued to fasten Ball's murder upon him, as he expressed it. Stritt was down the trail when I was attacked. He has gone out of his way to implicate Mr. Baynes."

"The man's imagination is running riot," Stritt laughed.

Instantly he shot out of the group and into the door of the men's camp, one of Twilight's strong hands at his collar, the other at the seat of his trousers.

"Don't let me catch you outside that cabin again or I'll tie you up so you can't move!" cried the trapper fiercely.

It was the first time he had displayed any temper and his anger had not diminished when he turned toward Baynes.

"And you stay in your house too. I'll have to ask your daughter to stay there with you. I'll get any directions you want to give about the foxes and I'll see that Paquette carries them out."

"This is absurd," began Baynes in his characteristically belligerent tone. "I won't stand for it an instant. This is my place, my property, and I will not be ordered about by an outsider. And I won't stand for these veiled charges and suspicions. If you have anything against me, come out in the open and give it."

"You seem to forget, Mr. Baynes," interrupted John, "that one man has been killed and an attempt made to kill another. We don't know whether a determined criminal or a deranged person is at work here, and it is as much for your safety as for that of any one else that we want you people kept within bounds. We do not want to be harsh about it, and, if you will give us your word to remain in your cabin, we will not attempt to restrain you. Otherwise, we will maintain a guard, an armed guard."

Baynes stared in sheer amazement at John and then turned abruptly, took Myra's arm and started toward his cabin. He had not gone a dozen steps before the sound of a tinkling bell came from the bay and every one looked to see a team of five dogs coming around the point. On the toboggan behind sat a man.

"Tom!" cried Paquette. "The trail to town she ain't got any bottom any more."

Stritt came to the door and looked out and in silence all those at the fox-farm watched the tired dogs trying to make a final spurt of it in the soft going. In silence, too, the group stood when Geggie halted his team before the door of the men's camp and arose from the toboggan.

"Couldn't make it, Mr. Baynes," he said, stooping to unlash a small canvas sack.

As he handed the mail bag to his employer he glanced inquiringly at John and Twilight and then continued:

"The ice is out in the river and the trail's bare on the big burn. We'll have to wait until navigation opens."

"But you must get out!" cried Baynes. "You've got to get out and notify the police and get them up here. The fox-farm will be ruined if we don't get them here at once."

The foreman stared uncomprehendingly and then glanced again at John and Twilight.

"You see," Myra explained, "Mr. Ball has been murdered."

"Ball! Murdered!"

In the middle of the waiting group Geggie stood staring at Myra until the announcement had fixed itself in his mind. Then

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with an almost involuntary jerk of his head he turned toward Stritt. An expression of comprehension, of understanding, flashed in his eyes for an instant, but he looked away at once and asked:

"Who did it?"

"We don't know," Myra answered. "But that is not all. Black Hector and his mate and the second pair of foxes have been stolen and less than an hour ago Mr. Reid was attacked when he was down on the trail and nearly killed."

"Black Hector gone!"

The foreman stared at her incredulously. Again he shot a quick glance toward the door, but this time Stritt was ready for him.

"Don't look at me in that fashion, Geggie!" he exclaimed. "As a matter of fact, you are the only one who left the island and these men have examined the tracks and have accounted for every one else. They have also found that no one came to the island last night."

"You mean to accuse me!" came from the foreman in a half whisper as he stepped forward, his hands clenched.

"I'm merely stating the facts."

"No man can say that and get away with it!" exclaimed Geggie as he darted forward.

"Keep quiet, all of you!" ordered Twilight as he jumped in front of Stritt. "Let him talk, Geggie. There's been lots of talk today and nobody got anything by it. But you've got to keep bounds with the others just the same. You were at the pens last night at about the time Ball was killed and there's just as much reason for suspecting you as the others."

"What do you mean—in bounds?"

"It's a precaution we have taken," John explained. "Ball has been killed and I was attacked by some one who evidently intended to kill me. That it was some one present here is beyond a doubt, and for the protection of the others, not only from danger but from further suspicion, we have decided to make each one keep to the house in which he lives."

While John had been speaking Baynes had left Myra's side and walked around the group and into the door. When he was half way across the living-room Stritt turned and followed and John saw them go into the latter's room. He was about to investigate when he heard their voices and the next moment Baynes came out. Passing straight through the group, he took Myra's arm and went with her to his own cabin.

Geggie, apparently bewildered, looking after Baynes and then back to Twilight, turned at last to his waiting dogs and drove them across the clearing to the dog pen, where he unharnessed them.

AS HE walked away Twilight drew Paquette to one side and spoke to him in a whisper. Then he called John to him.

"You feel kind of shaky?" he asked.

"Only a little. I'm all right."

"Well, Paquette just told me Stritt's got a revolver and Geggie a rifle and that there's a revolver in Baynes's room. That's all the guns on the place, he says. You go over and get Baynes's and I'll collect these. We don't want them to get the best of us."

Indifferently and without comment, Baynes turned over his weapon. John took one revolver and gave the other to Twilight.

"I don't know what I want of that," commented the trapper, "but I'll keep it away from them. Slip the bolt out of that fancy gun of Geggie's and it'll be harmless. I'll take it with me."

"Now," he continued when they were alone outside again, "I'm going to take a trip down the trail to see what happened to you. Whoever did it must have left tracks. I won't be gone too long."

Soon after Twilight had disappeared on the trail to the pens Geggie came up to John as he sat in the doorway of the men's camp.

"I'm going to bed," he announced. "I traveled all night. But I want something to eat first. I'll go over to Baynes's house and get it."

The foreman seemed to be his natural self again, and John took an opportunity to study him more carefully before he spoke.

The man was evidently about forty years old. John had seen him at the farm the previous Summer, when he had directed the work, and, John felt, had had something to do with Baynes's attitude toward the Indians. He had proved himself a capable woodsman, however, and as he stood before John, six feet of skilful muscle, he was true to his type. John had known several such men, intelligent, good workmen, good bushmen, at home in a canoe or with the dogs.

His face was strong and determined as

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is that of any successful man of the open. The dark eyes rarely told anything, nor did his perfectly controlled features. The solitude of the forest often develops in a white man the repression and the apparent lack of emotion of the Indian, and Geggie seemed to be one of these.

As John saw that he could gain nothing from a study of the man's face he realized that before him was some one who could tell more, probably, of the real conditions on the fox-farm than any one else. He resolved to talk to Geggie later.

"Paquette is preparing a meal now," John replied. "I'll have him bring yours and Stritt's over here as soon as it is ready."

After he had eaten Geggie went to bed and to sleep. Stritt went into his room and John resumed his vigil from the doorway. There was no sign of any one at the Baynes cabin and most of his time as he sat there the young man's thoughts were upon Myra rather than upon the increasingly conflicting aspects of the fox-farm mystery. When he finally realized that more than an hour had gone by and Twilight had not returned, he wondered if the trapper had found some new and important clue, something that might clear up the tangle.

He went into the living-room and could hear Geggie's snores. The rustle of a paper in the adjoining room told that Stritt was still there. He looked out of the door. No one had left the Baynes cabin. It would be safe for him to steal a few minutes and run down as far as the pens to see what Twilight was doing.

With a quick look around he started across the clearing. At the edge he looked back before plunging down the trail. There was a movement at the window of the Baynes living-room and he felt sure that he saw Baynes watching him. But he walked slowly out of sight and then began to run.

John's feet sank nearly a foot into the soft, melting snow that had been packed by a Winter's snow-shoes and the difficult going forced him to keep his eyes on the trail. As he dashed around the second bend, however, he glanced up to see Myra Baynes less than thirty feet in front of him.

Instantly the girl shrank back and then started to step into the brush. But at once she seemed to see the futility of such a course and turned to face John squarely.

He, in turn, could only stare incredulously. Myra had broken bounds. She whom he would have trusted to the last had been the first to violate a rule upon which so much depended.

Once more, and more completely than ever before, John was nauseated by the entire affair. He felt that he could not go on with the investigation, could not press it to an end which loomed before him with such a dreadful, convincing certainty.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HIDDEN FOXES

FOR a full minute the two stood facing each other. Neither moved. John, stunned, sickened, weak with the fear that had come to him, could only stare. Myra, accepting the fact that she had been caught, her mind not paralyzed by the shock that had come to him, studied the young man's face.

She did not do so furtively, trying to read his thoughts with quick glances. After the first instant of their meeting there had been no fear or any attempt to deceive him. But as she looked at the stricken face beneath the bandage, saw the dull apathy give way gradually to resolution, caught the final despondent shrug of the shoulders, she sprang forward.

"No, no!" she cried tensely. "You must not give it up! You must not!"

John looked at her in astonishment. He had decided to abandon the entire affair, to go back to his cabin and leave the fox-farm to its own tragedies and dangers. He would not go on along the path which led so unmistakably to this girl and her father. He had caught her breaking what he had considered a sacred agreement. By stealth she had left the cabin, had evaded him and had gone to the place where Ball had been killed, where the foxes had been stolen, where he himself had been attacked.

He recalled, too, the footprints of a woman in moccasins Twilight had found at the scene of Ball's death and the quick glance of understanding that had passed between father and daughter upon the announcement of the foxes' disappearance.

And yet here was this girl, this girl who had forced suspicion upon him, urging him to stay and continue to gather evidence against her and her father.

"I can't!" he cried despondently but firmly. "I can't go on with it."

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"But you must!" she replied and, besides the entreaty in her eyes, John caught another expression that dimmed all that had gone before.

"Don't you see?" she continued pleadingly. "If you go there is no one to do what must be done, no one to get the truth of all this. There is no one to——"

She faltered an instant and for the first time her glance fell.

"I don't want you to go," she said simply and when she looked up her eyes were frank and honest, without a trace of deception or pretense.

Again the victim of the recurring shock of this increasingly inexplicable mystery, John involuntarily stared past her down the trail whence she had come, and in his eyes there appeared a question.

"I know!" she cried quickly. "You think I have broken bounds. You think my being here now at this time shows that I know more than I have told. But it doesn't! It doesn't!"

She searched his eyes and found that the question still lurked, that he did not believe.

"Listen," she went on quickly. "I can't tell you why I came down here, why I went out of a window on the other side of the cabin and came around the clearing through the brush. I can't tell it, not now. But," and her manner suddenly became tense, "you must believe me when I tell you that my coming here at this time has nothing whatever to do with Mr. Ball's death last night or with Black Hector being stolen. Later, sometime, I will tell you, and you will see. But now I can only ask you to believe what I say."

It was unaccountable, John knew, that anything could have been of sufficient importance to cause Myra to bring suspicion upon herself at a time when far graver things impended. It was unreasonable, illogical. And yet, despite what his intelligence told him, despite what he had seen and learned since his coming to the island that morning, one glance at those imploring eyes and he was ready to believe.

But John did not succumb at once to what he knew to be only his desire to believe her. Not only what had happened that day but the previous Summer flashed through his mind, and there came to him the memory of an entirely similar occasion.

"I asked you to believe me last year when I had the difficulty with your father over the Indians," he said. "I knew I was right, that he was unreasonable, and I thought I could explain it to you, that you would understand. But you refused to see my side of it. You agreed with him, which was altogether reasonable in a way, I suppose, though I looked upon you as a friend."

"I know," she interrupted quickly. "But didn't you see that there was something else back of what I did? Haven't you seen since you came the position I am in, what I have to contend with?"

He looked at her blankly.

"It is this," and he saw that she was forcing her courage. "My father is all I have in the world. He was a big, successful, strong man until he began to drink. He lost his grip on himself, on his business, on everything. I tried to help him, but it was useless. He had always been accustomed to success and he was impatient, irritable, excitable, despondent, when failures came rapidly. He had always won before and he would not admit to himself that any weakness of his was responsible for the gradual wiping out of his business.

"When the end came I got him interested in fox-farming. I thought it would get him into the open, away from drink. I thought his nervousness would disappear and that he could rebuild himself physically. When we came and started work here he was still drinking, still irritable. He was sensitive to criticism, to suggestion. You see, he knew he had failed in the city, he knew this was a fresh start, and because it was his nature he had to succeed by his own efforts if his success was to be of value.

"That is why I had to keep in the background, why I had to be careful and have my suggestions appear to be his own ideas, why I could not take sides against him even when I knew him to be wrong, as he was with you and the Indians."

She stopped speaking but John saw that it was not that she had finished but that this recital of what she had suffered in silence through the long, lonely year in the wilderness had weakened her resolve to tell him all. Then her face lighted suddenly.

"But I succeeded for a time," she continued. "Through most of the Winter father did not touch a drop. He became his old, natural self again, and I wish, Mr. Reid, you could have known him then. He isn't nervous and excitable and petulant.

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He is the father I have always known, the father I want back."

"But why this change now?" John asked because he felt somehow that she expected the question.

"He is drinking again, though I don't know how or where. It has only been the last month or two. But," and she took a quick step toward him, "that hasn't anything to do with what has been happening here. He may become irritable and excitable, but his real character is not changed. Mr. Reid, he is no more capable of the crimes that have been committed here, or of any connection with them, than you would be.

"Things have gone wrong. Attempts have been made to steal the foxes, we feel certain, but father has not been responsible. If he could only stop drinking for a time I know he would be heart and soul with you in your efforts to get at the bottom of all this."

John Reid could not help but believe what he had heard. He swung so quickly to the other side that he condemned himself for having ever thought of giving up the work he had undertaken. Suddenly there came to him a picture of this courageous young woman giving up everything she had considered worth while to come up into the wilderness and aid her father to regain his self-respect and self-mastery. He saw her there alone on the island, struggling with a problem few men would face, and through it all keeping her faith and her hope.

But once his determination to trust Myra had come, once he had resolved to see the mystery through to the end, his mind turned at once to the practical features of the case.

"You say your father has been drinking again?" he asked. "How does he get it? Does Geggie bring it in?"

"No, Geggie does not. I always see the toboggan unloaded. And I know there is none in the house."

"But you suspect where he gets it?"

She flushed, hesitated, finally shook her head.

"I think we both know," John continued quietly. "And don't you think that, under the circumstances, your father's drinking should be stopped? To protect himself against suspicion, he should be at his best.

"Do you remember when he went into the men's camp and into Stritt's room? There wasn't any fight in him when he entered but when he came out he was excitable and pugnacious again. Later I saw the same thing happen. And I know that Stritt has something to drink in his room."

"You are sure of that?" Myra demanded.

"Positive. I have seen Stritt drink absinth and he has offered it to me."

"Absinth!"

HORROR more than surprise forced the exclamation from Myra. In the terrified face she turned toward John he realized what his statement had meant to her. And as he watched her struggle to restrain her sobs he felt an almost uncontrollable desire to take her in his arms and comfort her, for his compassion was subject to as great a strain as was her control.

"It was absinth that ruined him down in the States," she said after a moment. "It was absinth that I wanted him to come up here to get away from, and I thought he had none of it for more than a year. The only thing he had last Summer was whisky, which has been bad enough. But with absinth! Why, it makes a demon of him!"

She stopped in sudden, wide-eyed horror and stared at John. There was a greater fear than he had ever seen in her eyes and he knew that fear was not for herself, not for her father, but for what, with his brain inflamed by absinth, her father might have done, might still do.

Myra's terror aroused only anger in John, a great, gripping rage against the cause of her sorrow, probably the cause of the entire trouble on the island. Instinctively he turned back toward the clearing as if to put an end at once to Stritt's activities.

"Wait!" exclaimed Myra as she grasped his arm. "Don't! Let me! I can!"

"You have enough to do," she added when she saw the perplexed expression in his eyes. "You have the other. This is my problem."

"I'm going to make it mine."

"But you must not. You must do the other. It is more important. Leave Foster Stritt to me."

Doubt and dismay checked John's impetuous movement. Why should she insist that he must not go to Stritt about the liquor he was furnishing to Baynes? He remembered what Ball had told him:

"Stritt is betting his last twenty thousand dollars against all Baynes owns."

Had Stritt succeeded so far that Myra sought to protect him, too? Had he, in one

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of his schemes, snared her? In Reid's perturbed mind there was nothing to restrain jealousy and his anger increased. Somehow he felt that he need not fear Stritt himself but only Stritt's machinations.

He could not conceive of Myra caring for this man who was so evidently a villain. Secretly he determined to settle the absinth question as quickly as possible, but Myra did not know that he had abandoned immediate steps.

"You must leave that to me," she pleaded "You must go on, you and Twilight, and try to get to the bottom of this mystery before anything more dreadful happens."

As John looked at her he wondered if she really wanted him to go on, now that she knew what her father had been doing. She read his thought instantly but she did not shrink.

"Yes, go on," she insisted. "It must be done."

"All right," he answered. "I will. I'll see it through. But first I want you to tell me all you know, all the truth. If I am to do this for you, and that is the only reason I will go on with it, I must have your confidence. I must know all that you know."

"You do," she declared quickly.

He looked past her down the trail, to the place where he had first seen her, and Myra saw the doubt in his eyes.

"That has nothing to do with it," she protested. "I will explain all that in time. Won't you take my word that there is no connection between my being here now and what has happened on the island?"

He could not resist the insistence of her voice, her manner, her eyes, and impulsively he exclaimed:

"I do believe you. And I'm going to do all I can to clear this up."

"Thank you," she said, extending her hand.

Then as he clasped it she added without embarrassment:

"And I'm very sorry about last Summer and what you thought. I hope nothing grows out of this to prevent our being friends."

John, exalted, eager to go on with the work of investigation, suddenly anxious to clear up everything so that he could again be a visitor at the fox-farm, could again have that opportunity which he suddenly realized he desired more than anything in the world, walked back to the clearing with Myra. In front of the men's camp she left him and went on to her own cabin. John saw her father open the door and wait impatiently for her on the veranda. He saw him speak to her, saw Myra stop for an instant, and talk with him, and then saw him follow her into the house.

John first satisfied himself that Stritt and Geggie were still in their rooms and then returned to his vigil on the doorstep. A strong south wind was still blowing but in the warm sunshine it was very comfortable there and he looked out over the lake, his mind turning from the mystifying events of the fox-farm tragedy to Myra and the new relation that had been established between them.

In the reaction he felt only shame that he had ever doubted her, that he had permitted himself to be swayed by what had appeared to be suspicious circumstances. He thought of the long years she had spent alone, trying so desperately to rebuild that which her father had lost. He felt only the most tender compassion for what she had gone through, only justified wrath because of what she now faced, and, if the warm sun brought dreams, they were of the rosiest. For somehow, he had faith in the future, in everything that the future would bring.

His reverie was ended by a figure on the ice. Some one had come out from beyond the point on which the Baynes cabin stood and was walking straight south to the other tip of the crescent. John jumped to his feet but the stranger was directly under the sun and his identity could not be distinguished.

But the man walked rapidly and in a moment John saw that it was Twilight Jack. The trapper went on until he disappeared around the southern point of the island. Almost immediately he returned, this time coming straight across the bay toward the clearing. When at last he stopped at the woodpile and beckoned John to him, he watched his friend closely as he approached.

"What was she doing down there?" was his first question.

John stared, for he had not even considered Twilight's ever hearing that Myra had broken bounds.

"I don't know," he answered somewhat lamely.

Twilight only looked at him, searchingly, as though suspecting something was being kept back.

"It's this way, Jack," John explained more

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in self-defense than because he felt that he must share all information with his co-worker. "Her being down the trail there has nothing to do with what we are working on. I can't tell you now, but I can later."

"You mean you don't know?"

"Yes," was the hesitating admission. "I don't know, yet."

"How do you know it has nothing to do with what we are working on?"

John flushed, showed his indignation.

"She told me so," he answered somewhat stiffly. "She said she would explain it all later but that she couldn't now."

The stern, almost relentless, expression faded from Twilight's face. John felt something omniscient in the very compassion of the other's gaze, yet he resented even the sympathy.

"It is true!" he protested.

"I wish it were, lad," was the quiet answer. "I wish it were. But I've just been following her tracks and I found something. She struck the trail up near the clearing here, after coming round through the brush, and she left it at exactly the place where you were lying this morning and at exactly the place where Stritt passed Baynes when they were coming from the pens last night."

John grew giddy at the thought of what this might portend. He tried to fight back the fear that came to him.

"What of that?" he demanded, more to bolster his fleeting faith.

"There is this about it," answered Twilight slowly. "She left the trail there to go into the swamp in the center of the island. And back in the place where she went to is a pair of foxes in a couple of crates. She was taking them a meal of meat scraps and she threw the pan away, probably when she saw you coming."

CHAPTER IX

STRITT LEADS IN ANOTHER GAME

JOHN turned and found a seat on the woodpile. He was wholly unnerved by Twilight's statement. His reestablished faith in Myra had been strong and now the shock was all the greater. But his hope was not entirely dead.

"You don't mean," he demanded with a slight show of indignation, "that Baynes has been stealing his own foxes?"

"I don't know whether he has or not," was the puzzled reply. "That's the funny part of it. You see, this pair back there in the cedar swamp isn't Black Hector and his mate or the ten-thousand-dollar ones. It's another pair altogether, and they've got four cubs, one black, two red and one cross."

"Not Black Hector or the others!" cried John. "Then it isn't a stolen pair at all!"

"It was stolen, if Baynes's taking it from the pens last night was stealing. You see, it straightened out a lot of things, my finding them, though I don't know any more what it means than I did before. Only, it tells how Stritt passed Baynes on the trail without their seeing each other."

"I don't understand," interrupted John.

"It was this way," explained the trapper as he sat down beside his friend. "Or, it's the way I've figured it all out from the tracks. Baynes went to the pens last night and after he sent Paquette back to the house he took this pair of foxes and the cubs, which must have been born yesterday from the looks of them, and started toward the house here with them.

"Half-way to the pens there was a dead white pine stub standing right beside the trail. Old Baynes was cute enough to push that over, it being pretty wabbly at the base, so that it fell right into the thick brush east of the trail. When he come with his foxes he walked out on this stub into the brush, never leaving a sign unless some one went to the end of the stub and saw where he stepped off.

"Well, he carries the foxes out along this stub and into the cedar swamp, and if it hadn't been for me circling through the brush and running into his daughter's tracks I'd never have thought of looking for such a thing. But she came around through the brush from her house and I guess she didn't know exactly where she was for she come out onto the trail this side of where the stub was pushed over and walked down the trail to the stub and then out on it to the foxes. She fed them and started to go back the same way when you saw her."

"And Stritt ran from the pens to the clearing without seeing Baynes because Baynes was off the trail hiding the foxes," said John.

"Exactly. That would seem to show that Baynes was telling the truth when he said he didn't see any one down there. But Stritt we know, must have seen Ball's body

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lying there even if he isn't the one that killed him, because he ran all the way back. And if he saw that he probably saw Baynes taking the foxes out, too."

"And that same place," John said in a half whisper, for he knew exactly what his words meant, "is where I was lying, and Baynes was in the swamp at the time because Stritt met him half-way."

Twilight laughed outright.

"That's a good one," he said, slapping his knee and rocking back and forth. "That's the best thing that ever happened, lad. It's got some one badly twisted, your getting laid out that way."

"What do you mean?" came the indignant query. "There's nothing funny in an attempted murder, Jack."

Twilight continued to chuckle, stopping only to exclaim:

"I forgot to tell you about that."

"What about it?"

"Why, you see, no one hit you at all. No one was near you, and whoever killed Ball is worrying about who's butting in and trying to kill you. We'll just keep this quiet between ourselves and maybe something will come of it."

"Have you gone clean off your head, Jack?" demanded John. "How do you reconcile that cut on my head with the statement that no one hit me?"

"It's this way. I followed your tracks and you went on down to the shanty and along the outside fence of the pens in the deep snow. There was an old white pine stub about thirty feet high and standing less than six feet from the high fence. That strong south wind blew it over this morning just as you went by and the broken piece fell across the fence and snapped off a post. The post hung to the wire by a staple and the free end of it whipped out and laid open your head. That's who attacked you."

"Why, I don't remember even going as far as the pens."

"I know. You said you didn't remember what happened before or after you was hit. Now you know. I followed your tracks, and you crawled part way back, and there is a couple of your hairs sticking in the free end of that broken fence post yet."

John stared at Twilight for some time before he spoke again. He was readjusting himself to this new situation and trying to deduce what it might mean.

"Well," he said at last, "it may keep some one bothered, Jack, but I don't see how it helps us any."

"But I haven't told you all of it," and Twilight became serious again. "You see, this stub broke off about ten feet up, which was a funny place for it to break because the butt was pretty weak. The one Baynes pushed over was rotted nearly away at the ground and this was nearly as bad. But it broke where it was thick and sound.

"Then it fell straight west, right across the fence, though the wind was blowing straight from the south. Then I saw two funny holes in the snow at the base of the stub. I was figuring on all this after what I see happened to you. Then I remembered seeing a ladder leaning against the shanty.

"I packed this back to the pine stub and sure enough the ladder fitted right into those holes. I clumb up and the top of the stub, where it broke off, was all cut and chawed up. I looked close and saw some one had bored it with an auger and then cut out the auger marks with a cold chisel so they wouldn't show. And the stub had been undercut so the top would fall toward the west even with a south wind."

"But why was all that done?" demanded John.

"I forgot the principal part of it," confessed Twilight. "The top of the stub broke down the main fence when it fell and it reached over and broke down the fence of one of the inside pens, one of the two a pair of foxes was stolen from."

"And it was part of the plan to steal the foxes and make it appear that they had escaped!" cried John in instant comprehension.

"But they forgot to push it over, or the wind wasn't strong enough until you was down there today."

John pondered over this for a moment and then he asked:

"Are you sure it is not Black Hector and his mate or the other good pair that are back there in the swamp?"

"I'm pretty sure. Any of those foxes is domestic raised and used to seeing people. The two in the swamp is as scary as wild ones and each one's got a sore foot, as if it had been caught in a trap."

"Maybe that's one of the four inferior pairs they said they have here."

"No, I went back and looked at them again, and all four's still there. As near as I can make out, if Baynes is still telling

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the truth about the number of foxes they had, there's seven instead of six pairs on this island, or was until the two pairs was stolen."

"And Myra knows all this, knows all about it," said John as if to himself.

"Maybe she does and maybe she don't," was Twilight's unexpected answer. "There's so many funny things about this business I don't believe any one understands them all and I'll bet that right now the man who killed Ball is wondering who's stirring up all the rest of the fuss."

"What makes you think she doesn't know?" asked John quickly.

"Mind when I told her and Baynes about the two pair being stolen? They tried to be surprised about the ten-thousand-dollar ones, but they looked at each other quick and it was easy to see that they knew. But it was just as easy to see that Black Hector and his mate being gone was news to both of them. It's certain they didn't know anything about that."

"But they did about the others," added John finally and despondently.

For a long time he sat poking at the chips on the ground with his right foot. When at last he looked up he asked:

"What do you make of this whole thing, Jack?"

"Not much of anything yet, lad. Leastways, nothing certain. Baynes and Stritt have both been lying and covering something up. Each one's got some scheme on or they are working together and trying to make us believe they're fighting. Baynes knows about one pair of foxes being stolen and he's got another pair, one we never heard of, cached off there in the swamp.

"Stritt is a smart one and most of the things he's said and done have been to fool us. I wouldn't believe anything about that fellow unless I had the proof. And I wouldn't trust him any sooner. Geggie, I don't know anything about except that he was there at the pens last night."

John told Twilight what he had learned about Stritt bringing in absinth for Baynes.

"I noticed, too," he added, "the quick look that Geggie gave Stritt when he heard that Ball was dead."

"Yes, but no one left the island last night except Geggie, and it was last night that Black Hector and his mate left, too."

"But maybe they're hidden somewhere like the others."

"No, I made certain of that. I covered the whole island looking for a hiding-place, and I went clear around on the ice close to shore to see if there was any other place where some one had come and gone. And the only tracks made since the last snow are those to the pens and into the cedar swamp. No, Black Hector and his mate left the island last night, and they didn't run away."

John looked at the trapper anxiously. What had just been said led directly to the footprints of a woman in moccasins made the night before from the south end of the island to the pens and back again.

"You don't think," he asked slowly, "that it was Miss Baynes, and that she came back around by the ice, where she wouldn't leave any trail, and that she carried Black Hector and his mate to their house?"

"I'd thought of that," answered Twilight, "but they didn't know Black Hector was gone."

"It might have been the other pair. They knew the ten-thousand-dollar ones were gone."

"Yes, but if the foxes were in that house we would smell them. You couldn't keep them there half a day without everybody knowing it. No, as I look at this, we can't take any chances or make any guesses. We've got to know what happened. Now, you stick around tonight and watch everybody and see they keep in bounds. I'm going to take a little trip to see what I can learn."

"Where?"

"You've heard about that squaw living on the portage at the south end of the lake?"

"The Indians said something about a strange woman moving into that old shack of Pete Hanson's just before freeze-up but I haven't seen her."

Suddenly John whirled and stared at Twilight. There was excitement in his manner, a new hope in his eyes.

"You don't mean, Jack, that she was the one who was here, and it wasn't Myra?"

"I don't know anything about it. Only it's a chance and we can't overlook it. I'm going to get down that way about dark and see what things look like. I'll be back some time in the night."

"All right. I'll stay around and watch every one. And when Geggie wakes up I'm going to talk with him. I think he can tell things."

Twilight arose at once and went to the

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rear of the men's camp, where he had tied the big dog that had come with him to the island.

"If any one asks where I am, say I went over to your place for something we needed," he told John as he started down to the lake. "It's just as well not to let them know what I'm up to."

JOHN resumed his seat in the doorway of the men's camp. It commanded a view of the entire place unless some one wished to leave the Baynes cabin as Myra had done. He could hear Geggie's heavy breathing. Stritt moved occasionally in his room. Paquette came out of the kitchen in the Baynes cabin for an armful of wood. Through a window Baynes could be seen staring out over the clearing.

At last Myra came out with some clothes she had been washing and went to the clothes-line along the lake shore and in front of the men's camp. John hesitated as to whether he should join her when the door of Stritt's room opened and that young man crossed the living-room. For an instant he stood above John. Then deliberately he stepped past and down to the ground.

"Where are you going?" demanded John.

"Not far," was the indifferent reply, and Stritt walked around the woodpile and joined Myra at the lake shore.

John rose to follow but sank back to his place. After all, Stritt would not be out of his sight. He would let events take their course for a time. He would not hear what they said, but it might lead to something.

"Foster!" exclaimed Myra when she looked around a sheet she had been hanging to see the young man beside her.

"I didn't mean to frighten you and I never thought about this being a spooky sort of place," he said. "But I wanted to see you and thought I would do so while our friend up there could watch."

Myra looked up to see John and then turned to Stritt.

"Foster," she demanded, "why did you bring liquor in here for father, and absinth of all things? You know that is what I have been trying to keep from him."

"It does look bad, on the face of it," he admitted readily. "I never intended to until I saw he was getting so nervous and losing his grip again. That was only a couple of weeks ago, just after Ball came. I had a little and I gave him a few drinks because I saw he needed it."

"But now he will be as bad as ever."

"I think not. You temperance zealots overlook some things, Myra. You can't cut a man off short when he has been accustomed to a stimulant for years. It is liable to prove very disastrous, especially in the case of a highly strung man like your father. I think what little I gave him was beneficial. Without it he would have gone to pieces in the face of all that has happened."

Myra studied him closely as he spoke. She could find no reason for doubting a word that Stritt had said. He admitted what he had done, explained it plausibly. He had always been her friend. There was no reason for believing him to be anything else. Then Stritt went on:

"You know, don't you, that our detective friends have discovered those foxes in the swamp?"

Myra shrank back as if he had struck her and John, from his seat in the doorway, jumped to his feet.

"How?" she demanded breathlessly. "How did you know they were there?"

"I overheard them talking in the men's camp just before this sunset person left. It seems he discovered them this afternoon, after you came from there."

Again Myra gazed fearfully at Stritt. He took a step nearer and his voice sank to little more than a whisper as he leaned forward and said:

"They are doing their best to fasten this killing on your father, Myra, and I am afraid they will be able to do it. They are doing it through the tracks the trapper found this morning, tracks no one else can ever see again because they have been melted by the sun today."

"But they can't!" cried Myra frantically. "They can't when father didn't do it!"

"Such things have been done before and they can be done again. Reid doesn't care much about your father and he controls the other man. And now they think their finding the foxes in the swamp, the foxes your father hid there last night, clinches their case."

He hesitated a moment, and when Myra did not speak he added slowly:

"The trapper has gone and I know where he is going. He is going to the railroad by another route and he has gone to bring in

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the police and arrest your father. With what evidence these two have fixed up, partly fact and partly guesswork, they will have a strong case against him."

Myra's eyes never left Stritt's face. Terror held her dumb, without the power of movement. He saw this and waited an instant before he said:

"There is just one person in the world who can save him now."

Hope came back in a choking, overwhelming flood, and only Myra's quickly lighted eyes could put the question she wanted to ask. But Stritt did not answer directly.

"You remember what you told me one night last week?" he asked.

Instantly her whole manner changed.

"Not that!" she cried. "You can't mean it! You wouldn't do such a thing, demand such a thing!"

"But I do," he answered quickly. "In such things there are no rules, Myra. The cards are in my hands and I have them to play. And your word is enough. Tell me you will and I'll free your father from any evidence they can cook up against him."

"Do you realize what you are doing, Foster?" asked Myra in a low voice. "Do you know what it means? Do you realize that I would have to go through life knowing that my husband won me under such circumstances?"

"You don't seem to realize the circumstances," Stritt interrupted. "I said I could free him but I am taking great chances myself in doing so. These two want to fasten this thing on your father or me. They find it easier to make your father appear guilty. But they both believe I struck Reid down there on the trail. They think they have things against me, too, and if I tell what I must tell to free your father I leave myself wide open to what may be a certainty.

"Don't you see, dear," and he stepped closer. "Don't you see that I am not demanding this as a price? I am risking everything for you, risking my life even for what I want more than anything in the world."

Stritt saw that the repugnance and unbelief were fading and he looked away when he continued.

"Frankly, maybe I'm not man enough for it, Myra. But any one loves life, and any one would hesitate before he'd stick his head into a noose to save another. That's my predicament. I know it's my duty, but it comes too hard for me, too hard with nothing except virtue for a reward. I guess I'm not equal to it."

He turned to face her again.

"I may not get through with it, Myra, not with my part. I know I can clear your father but I am not sure I can clear myself. Only, if you promise to marry me, I'll take that chance. With that promise I'd take any chance, girl, do anything, risk anything. With that promise I can even stand the worst that may come to me. It would give me the courage I haven't now."

Myra had looked down at the blackened, trampled snow when Stritt had turned to her and she did not look up when he had finished. Her body sagged and she did not seem to have the strength to lift her head.

"Don't you believe me?" demanded Stritt fiercely.

"Yes, yes!" she answered. "I believe you Foster, only I can't answer now. But I will. I'll tell you tomorrow."

CHAPTER X

TWILIGHT TURNS GOSSIP

TWILIGHT JACK had about as miserable, aggravating travel as a man encounters. It looked inviting enough, the great, broad, level, white expanse, and early that morning when they had walked to the fox-farm it had furnished excellent footing.

But it was purely a delusion and only the man accustomed to such going can travel mile after mile and not give way to exasperation or become worn out. The foot passes through the surface of the snow as though it were not there. There is a slopping noise, and the foot continues on down through six inches or more of water before it strikes the hard, firm ice beneath.

When the second step is taken the first foot slips. Water splashes up. The snow and the slush and the water, though they offered no resistance to the entrance of the foot, combine to hold it back, and walking becomes a succession of slush, slip, pull, slush, slip, pull.

Footwear adequate for such conditions is rare and even Twilight's leather-topped rubbers began to fill. Water splashed up on to his clothing and ran down to find permanent lodging inside his shoes. Only the constant, strenuous activity kept his feet from becoming numb.

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Mike, the big wolf-dog, had as hard a time of it. His feet slipped on the ice beneath the water and snow and the toboggan, although lightly loaded, dragged as if it bore ten times its weight. But Mike trotted patiently on beside his master, never complaining, never shirking, never seeming even to expect that his lot would be made easier until the journey's end.

Twilight, accustomed to dozens of Springs in the North country, thought nothing of the difficulties of the going. As he plodded on his mind was at work on the mystery of the fox-farm. Never in his experience had he encountered anything so complex and baffling, a fact that brought him joy, however, rather than discouragement.

For Twilight had absolute confidence that he would reach a solution, that ultimately he would discover who had killed Ball and who had stolen the foxes. This was not a confidence in himself, in his own ability to solve any mystery, but in the weakness of all men and in the infallibility of signs in the forest.

Long years on the trap line, had given him the eyes and the experience necessary to see as plainly in a trail what another saw in print, and it had also brought him the great lesson upon which he always based his work—the fact that sometime, somewhere, would appear the one little thing that would tell him exactly what he wished to know.

Because these were the things he knew well, because they were the ones by which he had lived through many years in the wilderness, Twilight ascribed to them the first if not the only place. Upon them alone he said he depended, and motives, theories, deductions and psychological analyses were things which, he contended, were of no value.

Nevertheless the trapper did not ignore such things. He could not. He was too deep a student of human nature, no matter what his sincere protestations, not to be influenced by what he saw and heard, and he was too thoroughly human not to be guided by many of the impressions that had come to him.

So, while he had sought constantly for "that one little thing," he had been piecing together what bits of evidence he had found; had even followed out in his mind the possible motives and actions of each of those who might be implicated. And it was because of one of these theories that he was now out upon Beaver House Lake trudging steadily on through the wet.

For three miles Twilight did not alter his course. Then he stopped for the first time and looked back at the island which lay like a flat, dark blotch on the white expanse of the lake. From his low position it appeared to blend with the more distant shore, and it was so far away he could not distinguish upon it anything so small as a man.

The south wind, too, had finally brought clouds which covered the sky. The shine and the glitter of the sun on the snow was gone, and the brightness of the view had given way to a dull, gray aspect.

"They can't see me now," commented the trapper as if speaking to Mike, and he wheeled at almost right angles and started back toward the center of the lake and the south shore. For three miles more he continued steadily, the dog still beside him, and the sun had set and the early darkness of a cloudy night had begun to enshroud the lake when he finally struck a well-beaten trail.

He did not walk upon it, however, but off at one side, for he knew without trying it that the going would be much harder than where he was. The snow there was packed by many snow-shoes and heavily loaded toboggans, but underneath it the water had rotted the frozen base away. A foot would be held until half a man's weight was upon it. Then with jarring suddenness it would break through into the water and walking would become a tiring, sliding succession of jolts and slips.

Twilight was less than a quarter of a mile from the south shore of the lake, however, and once he had struck the shelter of the thick spruce he turned on to the trail which, hidden from the sun, had remained firm. For nearly half a mile he continued until, rounding a bend, he saw a square of light in a clearing on the right, a clearing which bordered another lake.

Quite openly Twilight approached. His loud "Whoa!" startled Mike and brought a reproachful look, one which turned to wonder when his master commanded him roughly to lie down on the trail.

THE trapper then went up to the door of the small, one-roomed cabin and knocked. Instantly it was opened by an Indian woman who stood squarely in the center and stared stolidly,

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not even a question in her expression or attitude.

"B'jou'," said Twilight, who rattled on in Ojibway to the effect that he had traveled all day and wanted to get supper before starting on.

The woman grunted and turned to the stove on which she had already begun her own meal, and Twilight followed her into the cabin. He did not make the mistake of sitting there and staring at the interior of what he saw at once to be rather an unusual place. Instead he talked steadily, inconsequentially, as some people talk to strangers.

He spoke of the trail he had traveled, of the wet, miserable going, of the way his feet slid and slipped and brought sore muscles and strained tendons. He bewailed the fact that he must keep going all night and hoped that the wind would continue to shift to the west and that it would clear up and freeze so that there would be better footing.

It was unlike Twilight, this trivial comment on everyday things, but it was not unlike a type of wilderness dweller. Some men who live much alone soon drop in mental activity to the little, simple, routine things of life, and their conversation is only vocal cogitation, an expression of every minute idea that comes to them. Such people have the faculty of rambling on for hours without ever saying anything interesting or original or worth while. The fast-disappearing type of drudging farmers' wives talks in the same way when suddenly confronted with a rare visitor.

Twilight had rambled on for some time before he gave the woman an opportunity to speak. Then, in answer to a question, she replied to his Ojibway in perfect English. He had expected this, for while he had been talking quick, furtive glances had shown that the woman was not of the wigwam variety. The place was neat in every respect. Her work over the little cook-stove indicated a culinary knowledge far above the ordinary. Food was contained in cans and bags neatly arranged on shelves. Her clothing was of neater fit and better workmanship than the usual squaw's garments.

During the meal itself Twilight continued his voluble comments. He touched upon trapping, the price of fur, his own success and abilities, the weather, the possibility of an early opening of navigation, all subjects of common interest in the wilderness. When the meal was over he returned to his seat on a bench beside the bunk and filled his pipe. In an hour he had not learned anything. The squaw had not spoken except in answer to his rare questions, and even in discussing trapping and the weather she had not ventured an opinion.

Her use of English merely denoted that she had spent much time with or near white people. Twilight surmised that she may have lived with a white man at one time, a common enough occurrence in the bush.

When at last he began to talk again he gradually worked around to the object of his journey.

"I was trying to get out before the ice was all gone," he said. "I didn't want to be shut in till canoeing opens. But now I've got to hurry faster than ever. I stopped at the fox-farm up on the island this afternoon and a man was nearly killed there last night."

Only by the usual little half grunt, half cluck, of assent did the woman display interest.

"He is going to die, I guess," Twilight went on. "Some one hit him over the head last night and he nearly froze to death before they found him this morning."

The squaw continued to wash her dishes, still without evincing any interest in the subject.

"He got his sense back for a few minutes this morning and told who hit him."

The squaw was wiping a dish and there was no perceptible pause in the rapid movements of her hands.

"He said it was an Indian."

The squaw wiped another dish as rapidly as the first.

"He got kind of weak and didn't say any more and then he came to long enough to say it was a squaw."

She polished a cup inside and out and put it away on a shelf.

"He gave a pretty good description of her then," Twilight babbled on, for he had spoken without pausing. "I wasn't there but the others told me about it. I didn't think any of the Indians would do such a thing and if I had time I'd go over and tell them what this man Ball said. He'll die and there'll be a hanging."

The squaw emptied her dishwater into a pail behind the door.

"If you happen to see any of the Indians

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from around Beaver House Lake you'd better tell them what happened. They'll spread the word around and whoever it was can see Reid. There's no use trying to run away for they'd be caught in the end. And Reid's the only one who can do anything for them. It's a wonder how that man can get an Indian out of a hole. You know him, don't you?"

The squaw shook her head.

"That's funny. I thought every Indian in the country knew Reid. He's the best friend they ever had. He's over at the fox-farm now and he'll be there right along. So if you see any Indians tell them where they can find him.

"I'd hunt one of them up myself, only those folks asked me to go out and get a policeman in as quick as I could, so I've got to hurry."

Twilight was silent for a few minutes. When he spoke again he seemed to have forgotten Ball.

"Did you see Geggie, the foreman, go by about noon?" he asked.

The squaw nodded without looking up from the sewing she had begun.

"He was away when Ball was hurt and didn't know anything about it until he got back. He says he thinks it's an Indian trying to steal foxes. He's quite sore about it. He takes more than usual interest in that fox-farm for a man who works by the month."

Twilight became more garrulous than ever.

"Great outfit there on the island," he said. "And there's money in foxes, too. Somebody's going to get rich there some day, but I wouldn't want to guess who it was. Geggie and Stritt both shining up to the girl. If Geggie gets her he'll get more than half the farm, but Baynes is drinking himself to death fast. If Stritt gets her he'll own three-quarters of it, and if he buys Ball's share he'll have it all. But the bull-cook up there tells me Baynes is going to get married again. Got a woman coming in from the States. It's going to be mighty interesting watching how it comes out."

He rambled on about the fox-farm and its people, extolling the charms of Myra Baynes and finding fault with each of the men in turn.

At last he arose, knocked the ashes from his pipe and started toward the door.

"I'll have to mooch," he commented as he looked out at the sky. "Guess it ain't going to freeze after all and I'll have hard traveling after that policeman. But I'll get him in all right. I know a way out none of them knows. And don't you forget to tell the other Indians if you see them. I hope they get to Reid first, for Reid's the only man that can help them."

He stepped out and then suddenly turned to face the squaw in the doorway.

"Forgot to pay you!" he exclaimed, reaching into a pocket.

The woman broke into a volley of Ojibway, many words of which sounded strangely to Twilight although he was perfectly familiar with the language. He gathered enough to know that she did not expect pay for the meal, would not take it and was glad to have given it to him. Twilight thanked her and went on.

He was grinning when he called to Mike to follow him on the trail to the railroad.

"Maybe that was a good piece of work, Mike," he said when they were out of hearing, "though I don't know."

The trapper had formed the habit, in his lonely life, of discussing many things with his sole companion and as he walked on along the soft trail he continued:

"Anyhow, we got her excited enough to talk Indian, though whichever of all those things I said did it I don't know. Which one do you suppose it was, Mike; Stritt or Geggie or Baynes? I worked them all in but she never let loose till the end."

He walked on in silence for a hundred yards and then stopped suddenly.

"That's it!" he exclaimed as he turned to the dog. "I knew I'd heard that kind of Indian before. Why, I haven't heard an Indian talk like that for twelve years, not since I left the North shore country."

CHAPTER XI

STRITT'S CARD WINS

WHEN Foster Stritt turned from his interview with Myra at the clothes-line and walked back toward the men's camp, John Reid still sat in the doorway. He had risen when Myra had recoiled before what the man had said and his impulse had been to rush down and end the conversation. It was easily seen that at least Stritt was not making her lot easier, and John's rage became intense.

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He was cool enough, however, not to rush blindly into something which he did not fully understand, and the revelations of Twilight Jack had, despite his desire to believe, aroused the dread and the distrust of an hour before.

Accordingly, as Stritt drew near, he stepped to one side, intending to let him pass without a word. Stritt, however, stopped squarely in front of him. For an instant he bent his head to one side as if listening to the sounds of Geggie's deep slumber. Then he turned suddenly and said:

"I suppose you know, of course, the weapon used to kill Ball?"

Despite their short acquaintance and the most evident mutual dislike, John, rather than irritated by the other's presence, was always placed on his guard. He turned slowly and looked at Stritt. He appeared to be calm but many things were rushing through his mind. What had been used to kill Ball, and what was Stritt's object in bringing up the subject?

There came to him a sudden picture of the long, narrow welt across the dead man's temple, and instantly from his subconscious mind came the explanation of something to which he had given no voluntary thought but which, nevertheless, had been continually obtruding itself in the back of his brain.

"Certainly," was his unhesitating response.

"But you haven't found it yet?" came as quickly.

John did not wish to admit or affirm anything in Stritt's presence and the latter took his silence as indicating failure.

"Let me tell you something," he continued. "Before you do too much guessing about this as you have about other things, I'll show you it wasn't mine. Come here."

He went into the living-room and crossed to his bedroom, emerging in a moment with a pair of snow-shoes in his hands.

"You probably recognize these as being of native manufacture," he said as he passed them to John. "You can also see that they would never fit that welt on Ball's head."

He strode to the rear wall of the room and returned with two more pairs which had been hanging on nails.

"Here are Geggie's and this pair is Paquette's," he said. "Each man made his own last Fall, they tell me. You can see that they are not the ones. Ball didn't have a pair. Couldn't use them if he did. The dogs hauled him in."

Stritt turned as soon as he had finished speaking and went into his own room, closing the door behind him. As the latch clicked behind him, John's rage bubbled over. The significance of what Stritt had said, the importance of the clue, the fact that he and Twilight had overlooked an essential bit of evidence, none of these things came to him. Instead a blinding rage because of the treachery of the action seized him and he strode across the room toward Stritt's door.

But John's better judgment asserted itself just as his hand reached for the latch and he turned instantly and went outside. As before he saw not only the futility but the imprudence of any altercation with Stritt or with any one else at this time, but he did not hesitate to indulge in a brief vision of the ultimate meeting between the two.

Outside John resumed his seat on the steps and, as his anger cooled, he turned to the revelation which had caused his indignation. The peculiar welt across Ball's head had aroused his interest when he had first seen the body and all the way up from the pens his position at the dead man's head had given him an opportunity to study it.

Under the stress of the moment, however, he had not concentrated his thoughts upon this one thing and since the funeral other matters had crowded it out entirely. Now, with his whole attention on the subject, he was surprised that he had not realized at once that it had been a snow-shoe, wielded as a club, that had been used to kill Ball.

The welt on the side of the head was as wide as the lashed frame. The transverse welts, which had first attracted his attention and which told their story so plainly, had been made by the strands of rawhide lacing. One broad welt showed that the large thong which passes under the toes at about the widest part of the ordinary snow-shoe had struck there. This indicated that it was a factory product, for the Indian shoe does not have so wide a lacing.

As John reviewed the situation he remembered that he had not seen snow-shoe tracks near the pens, and Twilight had not spoken of having seen them. But as Twilight's description of how he himself had been attacked had brought back recollections of things temporarily wiped from his

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memory, so Stritt's statement had aroused another picture.

On his way to the pens after the funeral and before he had been struck by the swinging fence-post, he had seen a pair of snowshoes hanging somewhere along the trail. For a moment he could not remember where, and then the picture of the shanty came to him, the roughly hewed log walls, the low eaves, and directly under the eaves and on the north side, the lacing thrust over a nail, were the webs.

John jumped to his feet instantly and started toward the pens, only to turn back slowly when he remembered that he was responsible for each of those on the island remaining within the prescribed bounds. As he stopped again before the door he saw Geggie coming out of his room, rubbing his eyes sleepily and staring about him. John beckoned to the foreman and at once led the way to the woodpile where he and Twilight had talked earlier in the day.

John's interests in the wilderness had not been confined entirely to Indians. He had seen many woodsmen and, despite his having come from a city, he had been popular with them. Much of this popularity had been due to his attitude toward them and to his instinctive understanding of their strange mixture of reticence and suspicion. Accordingly he knew exactly how to approach Geggie, though he did not do so confidently because he had recognized an unusually uncommunicative type.

"It's making nasty traveling, all this sun and the south wind," he began after the foreman had seated himself and was busy whittling a splinter from a pine log.

Geggie looked out over the lake, studied the clouds gathering from the south for an instant and then went on whittling. John did not feel rebuked. On the other hand, he knew that the foreman had given his words consideration.

"If this keeps up we'll be canoeing in three weeks," he added after an interval.

Geggie nodded, though his attention seemed to have been confined to the minute notches he was making at regular intervals. John waited some time before he spoke again. He was weighing his next remark carefully, for he knew much depended upon it. At last he said:

"I'll be glad when this thing's over. I'm laying up a nice little time for myself when I meet some one alone."

Geggie glanced up from his knife for the first time and looked at the men's camp. There was just the flicker of a smile around the corner of his mouth and then he went on whittling.

"I'm from a city myself," John went on quickly, and though he was jubilant he forced himself to the proper indignation, "but I can't stand for most of the men that come into the bush. They seem to think they're a little better than any one else just because their houses are more than one story high."

Geggie's smile was more evident now and after a moment he spoke.

"Stritt been riling you, too, eh?"

"He seems to rile every one that comes near him, but I'm going to have a little riling time of my own."

Geggie whittled and John appeared to be nursing his anger. When at last the younger man spoke again it seemed to be the result of much thought.

"I wouldn't put anything past him after some of the things I know he's done and the way he acts. But at that I almost wish we don't get the goods on him because if we do I won't have my little time. It would do me a lot of good to see him sent over, but three good wallops on that jaw would be a lot better."

"I know how you feel about it," Geggie said as he put a razor edge on the thin sliver and then cut it off. "He got me riled the same way when he came and I nearly took a poke at him one night. But lately he ain't been so bad."

John did not comment. He was grateful for this much and he knew that it meant more.

"I don't care much what a man does to me," Geggie continued. "I can take care of myself. But I hate to see a man always up to dirty tricks. Now there's Baynes. His daughter's been trying to get him to quit drinking, and she had when Stritt came along three months ago. He hadn't taken a drop for eight months. But Stritt brings in something, absinth, he calls it, and most every trip I've made out since then he's had me bring in more."

"Miss Baynes told me about it," said John.

"She told you," and Geggie looked up angrily.

"Oh, she didn't say you brought it in. She said she knew her father was drinking

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again and that Stritt was giving it to him. And she knows it's absinth, which put him under back in the States. She said she didn't think he was getting much, though, because she saw every toboggan from town unloaded."

Geggie chuckled.

"She saw every toboggan unloaded, all right," he said. "But Stritt was too smooth for her. He had me bring it as far as that cabin at the other end of the portage and he'd sneak down there nights and get it himself. I wouldn't bring it any closer because I knew it meant my job if I was caught at it. I brought some up last trip."

Geggie had been whittling while he talked, but now he suddenly closed his knife with a snap and, as he thrust it into a pocket, turned on his seat to face John.

"Do you know what I think?" he demanded. "Fact, I'm sure of it. This Stritt is flat broke. He hasn't got a cent except what's in this fox-farm, twenty thousand dollars. That's why he's staying here. He hasn't got enough money to get out. And what's more, he owes me eighteen dollars now for the last two shipments of booze he sent for. He didn't even have enough money for that, and he asked me to buy the money-orders, saying he would send a check out and have some money sent in. But I watched his mail and he never sent for any, and I know he's flat broke."

"That's what Ball told me!" exclaimed John.

Geggie glanced up quickly and then smiled.

"He told you, eh? Did he tell you the rest of it?"

"What's that?"

"About Stritt and Miss Baynes?"

John only nodded. This bringing Myra into what Geggie considered woodpile scandal checked his enthusiasm. The foreman smiled before he continued.

"I heard them," he said. "That Ball was a nervy little man. Nothing ever scared him. He gave Stritt as heavy as he got."

"He actually threatened to kill Ball?"

"Oh, he covered it up with high falutin' words but he meant that all right and Ball knew it."

"And you heard what Ball said to him, about how Stritt intended to get the whole thing?"

Geggie nodded and then smiled as he said:

"But Stritt had better hurry up. If I was to foreclose on him for my eighteen dollars he'd be bankrupt."

"So you think Stritt killed Ball?"

John had shot the question after due deliberation. He hardly expected a direct answer. He knew it might bring Geggie's loquacious streak to an end. But he had risked it.

"I'm not thinking anything about that," was the instantaneous reply. "I wasn't here last night, thanks to my luck, and I'm not going to mix in this thing unless I'm drawed into it."

"But you can testify to Stritt's threat?"

"Yes, and I can testify to a fine little row Ball and Baynes had last night just before I left. I didn't hear all they said but they made more noise than Stritt and Ball."

"But why should either one of them do it and steal those foxes?"

"How do you know it was the same one that did both?" Geggie countered.

"I don't, for sure, but it is reasonable to believe that."

"A man don't steal from himself."

"Sometimes he does, if there's more to be gained in the end. You said yourself Stritt is broke. What's to prevent him stealing these foxes and selling their hides to raise a few thousand dollars?"

"There is something in that," Geggie admitted. "But I'm not saying it's so."

"Can you say so?"

"No, I can't," was the somewhat indignant reply. "I've seen some funny things happening here but I didn't think they was any of my business and I kept my hands clear. I've done my work and taken my orders from Baynes. If they want to kill each other off it's none of my business."

THE foreman arose, dusted the shavings from his trousers and strolled back to the men's camp, leaving John to ponder over what he had learned. For five minutes he studied what Geggie had said and did not look up until he heard a step from the direction of the Baynes cabin. He turned to see Paquette coming from the kitchen.

"Come here," he called.

When the French-Canadian stopped before him John asked:

"Whose snow-shoes are those hanging on the side of the shanty down at the pens?"

"Baynes'," was the ready reply.

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"Go down and get them for me. I'd go but I can't leave this place until Twilight gets back."

John waited at the woodpile until Paquette returned with the webs under his arm. He handed them to John and went on about his work, wholly unconscious, apparently, of the reason back of his errand.

When he was alone John turned curiously to the snow-shoes. The first glance told him that they were the product of a factory that was alone in the use of an exceptionally wide thong across the front of the main webbing. He turned them over curiously, looking for possible blood-stains or hairs sticking to the sides, and then remembering that he might be watched by either Geggie, Stritt or Baynes, he picked up the webs and went into the men's camp, entering the room that had been Ball's and closing and locking the door behind him.

Again John searched eagerly for something to confirm his theory that one had been used as a club in the attack on Ball. But there was no blood, no hair. He examined each side of the two shoes carefully at the places which would have struck the dead man's temple, but he could find nothing.

It occurred to him that a snow-shoe was a light weapon with which to kill a man. To test the swing and weight of one, he grasped it by the tail with one hand. Instantly the shoe dropped to the floor with a clatter and John looked at the palm of his right hand to find a fresh scratch from which a drop of blood was oozing. He picked up the web and found that the tail had been broken and then mended by winding with brass rabbit snare wire. One end of the twisted wire had pricked his hand.

Again swinging the shoe with a new hold, he felt that it was not solid. A quick examination showed what he had missed before, what had probably been uncovered by the snow-shoe striking the floor. The frame, just back of the forward crosspiece and under that part of the lacing which had struck Ball, was broken clear across. And it was broken from side to side, not from top to bottom as always happens. John pulled the two pieces apart as far as he could and saw that the jagged edges were fresh and white.

For a moment he stood motionless, holding the snow-shoe before him. Then he became conscious that in his hands was the weapon that had ended Ball's life, but it was a further thought that struck him a stunning blow. He held the weapon that had killed Ball, and that weapon belonged to Myra's father.

John was not depressed by the evidence accumulating against the head of the fox-farm, which, as he felt, meant against Myra as well. Instead he was seized by a sudden determination to end the uncertainty once and for all. He felt that he could not stand any longer this dread that Myra was not what he believed her to be. He wanted to trust her, he wanted to have complete faith in her, and, so far as he was able, he had believed in her. But with each renewal of his faith came something to shatter it. The uncertainty must end.

At once he picked up both snow-shoes, flung open the door and hurried out of the cabin, across the clearing and up to the Baynes door.

Myra, white-faced, the strain showing in red-rimmed eyes, colorless lips, deepening lines, admitted him. Baynes, sitting across the table from the door, looked up, but a stare was his only greeting.

"Mr. Baynes," John began without any preliminary, "are these your snow-shoes?"

He laid them on the table directly in front of the head of the fox-farm and watched him closely as he bent to examine them.

"Yes," said Baynes somewhat defiantly, "they are mine."

"When did you use them last?"

"After that last storm."

"Where did you leave them?"

Something in John's voice as he asked the question caused Baynes to look up quickly.

"I left them at the pens, hanging on the wall of the shanty," he answered at last.

John did not ask another question at once and Baynes, leaning across the table, studied the young man closely. The two confronted each other. The eyes of neither wavered until Myra sprang to the end of the table and faced John.

"You shan't do it!" she cried fiercely. "You can't! You won't! It's useless for you to try, for I can stop your work any time I say the word. You have misled me. You have come in here and tried to fasten this murder on my father because of the trouble you had with him last Summer. You don't care for the facts, for the truth, for anything but to see him convicted. And I have played into your hands."

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Both John and Baynes had stared at her in amazement during the outburst. When she finished and stood glaring at John, that young man recoiled before the hatred in her eyes.

Slowly he stepped back toward the door. Not until his right hand had groped behind him and found the latch could he speak.

"You have said the word," he announced in a low, dry, emotionless voice. "My work here is ended. I took it up only because you asked me. I continued it when I wanted to stop only because you wished it. A minute ago I determined I would see it through at any cost, that I had to end the uncertainty of it. That is what I came over here to do.

"But now I don't care, somehow. I wanted to do the right thing, do what I thought was my duty. But I don't care any more. I'm going home now."

He opened the door, stepped out and closed it behind him.

CHAPTER XII

BAYNES DECIDES TO ACT

JOHN REID stumbled half-way across the clearing before he realized exactly what he had done and the possible consequences. Immediately he stopped and turned back to the Baynes cabin. He climbed the steps and opened the door without knocking. Baynes still sat across the table staring out of the window. Myra was not to be seen but the door to her bedroom was closed.

"I want to add," John said, "that what I just said applies only to myself. Twilight Jack, I am sure, will not give it up. And because I owe it to him I will remain until he returns and will see that no one breaks bounds."

He turned at once and walked out. His feet slipped in the snow and small pools of water. Once he almost fell and in catching himself he realized for the first time how near exhaustion he was. His head ached, the strength had gone from his legs, and it was only by concentrating his mind on each step that he was able to proceed.

John had believed that he had received only a glancing blow, that his head had been tapped by the snapping fence-post in such a way as to relieve him of consciousness but not hurt him seriously. He did not know that the blow had really weakened him and that only the excitement and his desire to reach the bottom of the mystery had kept him on his feet.

At the woodpile in the middle of the clearing he was forced by weakness to sit down. He tried to fight the desire to sleep but he found that he did not care much whether he remained awake or not. There was no reason why he should, he argued. He was through with the entire affair. Myra not only suspected him of unfairness but had openly accused him of making her father the victim of a treacherous revenge, and her eyes had told how she hated him.

Without Myra he felt that there was nothing left for him. If he could not help her he did not care to have anything further to do with what he now felt to be a rotten condition of affairs on the island. If he did stay and continue the work he was certain that it would lead to Baynes, and Baynes convicted meant the end of all things for him.

Even his hatred of Stritt did not rouse him and his one desire was to reach the men's camp, throw himself upon a bed and rest. As he arose to do so Paquette came out for an armful of wood.

"That Twilight, he be here to supper?" he asked.

Mention of his friend's name brought John to a realization of what he owed his friend at least. He might desert his own duty but he could not abandon the man who placed absolute confidence in him.

"Paquette," he said, "I'm very tired. I'm going into the men's camp and lie down. My head hurts too much to stay up and watch. But you can watch. You can see what they all do, and if any one starts to leave, or does anything else, come and waken me. Sit there in the door of the men's camp so you can see everything."

"But the supper," protested the bullcook.

"Let them get their own supper," snapped John. "See here, Paquette. There's a madman on this island. Ball was killed last night. The foxes were stolen, fifty thousand dollars' worth. Some one tried to kill me this morning. No one knows what will happen next, who will be killed next. You sit there and watch and if any one starts to leave, come and waken me."

He arose and walked, more steadily now, to the men's camp, crossed to the bedroom occupied by Ball and entered. As he was

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about to close the door he saw Paquette sitting on the steps, his face turned toward the Baynes house. John lay down and in an instant he was sound asleep.

Darkness came while the French-Canadian sat there. He saw a lamp lighted in the Baynes's living-room. Presently another was lighted in the kitchen. A moment later Baynes threw open his front door and called:

"Paquette! Paquette! Cŏme here and get some supper for us."

The bullcook did not answer. Baynes strode down the steps and came across the clearing.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded when he saw Paquette sitting in the doorway. "Why didn't you answer when I called? Come on over to the house and get some supper. Myra isn't fit to do it."

Paquette hesitated. John's description of a madman loose on the island was still fresh in his mind, still weighted him with a feeling of his responsibility. But the big, domineering figure of his employer, the man he had been accustomed to obey for a year, was a nearer, more concrete terror. He had always obeyed Baynes. Baynes had paid him his wages. Baynes had always been the boss.

"All right," he said as he arose. "I get the supper."

Together they went away in the darkness. When they had entered the other cabin Stritt's door opened and he stepped quietly out into the main room. He tiptoed over to John's room, listened a moment, and then went out and across to the Baynes cabin.

Stritt found only Baynes in the living-room. Myra's door was closed. He could hear Paquette in the kitchen.

"The ruler of our little island seems to have abdicated," he remarked.

"He told you?" asked Baynes.

"No, he didn't say anything but he went into Ball's room and lay down and in half a minute he was asleep, if sounds count for anything."

Baynes did not comment. He only looked at Stritt a moment and then turned back, as before, to stare out of the window. After a few minutes Paquette announced that supper was ready. Baynes and Stritt followed him into the big room which served as both kitchen and dining-room.

"Me call Tom?" asked Paquette when they were seated.

"No," answered Baynes quickly. "He'll come over when he's ready."

Twice Stritt attempted to open a conversation with Baynes, but the older man was preoccupied and his answers or comments were monosyllabic. When the meal was finished Stritt returned to the men's camp. Baynes still sat at the table and a few minutes later Geggie entered.

"I want to see you when you are through eating, Tom," said his employer as he went into the living-room.

FIFTEEN minutes later Geggie joined him. He was invited to a seat and for several minutes sat in silence, waiting for Baynes to speak.

"These two men, Reid and the one they call Twilight Jack, have been trying to fasten this murder on me, Tom," he finally began.

Though his voice was calm it was with difficulty that he kept it so, and at the end of his first sentence he suddenly lost control of himself.

"But I didn't do it!" he cried almost hysterically. "I never saw Ball alive after I talked to him here on the veranda last night just before you left. Ball used to be my best friend. He'd trust me and I'd trust him with anything. Why should I want to kill him?"

The big man turned with the imploring gesture of a child to his foreman, only to meet the woodsman's cold, questioning eyes.

"My ——, Tom!" cried Baynes in even greater panic. "You don't believe it, too, do you?"

"I don't believe anything because I don't know anything," was the quiet answer. "I left before this thing happened and I got back after it was all over. I haven't been down to the pens or seen a track. How should I know?"

"But you know I wouldn't do such a thing."

Geggie only shrugged his shoulders.

Baynes's terror changed swiftly to anger.

"What's got into you all?" he cried. "Do I look like a murderer, or act like one, that every last one of you should think I did this? Stritt thinks I hit Reid on the head. They all say I killed Ball. Now you join them."

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"I didn't say anything of the kind," Geggie replied quietly. "I just said I didn't know anything about it, and I don't. I'd be a fool to say any one did it."

"But you said you didn't know but that I was capable of such a thing."

The foreman did not back down. He returned Baynes's gaze steadily and he was perfectly calm when he spoke.

"Look at it yourself as any one else would," he advised. "You know you've got a bad temper. You fly off the handle when anything goes wrong. And you've generally got some of that green booze in you. Those are the things every one thinks about, those and that row you had with Ball out on the veranda last night."

As Baynes had gone from panic to anger, he now reverted to the cool, level-headed man he had once been. Calmly he looked at Geggie, though his eyes showed that he was studying the entire situation rather than his foreman's face.

"What would you do?" he finally asked.

"Me? I don't know. I haven't thought about it."

"Well, think now. What would you do if you were in my place, if you hadn't killed Ball but every one suspected you of it?"

"Why, if I hadn't killed him I'd just let 'em go ahead. If I didn't do it they couldn't prove that I did."

"But they are proving that. They wanted to and they found out enough to make it look that way. They made up the rest. Give them time and they'll hang me."

Geggie did not comment and Baynes went on.

"Then there's the disappearance of the foxes, fifty thousand dollars' worth gone in a night. Then there's Reid's being attacked down there on the trail. I was there at the pens last night. And Ball was killed there. I was down the trail this morning and Reid was hurt when I was there. That's nearly enough for them to hang me on right there."

Still Geggie made no comment and Baynes continued:

"From the time we started here, Tom, you've told me about watching out for the Indians. You said they would steal our foxes if they got the chance. Once before I suspected it, and last night I thought there might be something doing. If I'd only stayed at the pens instead of coming up to the house I would have caught them at it.

"It's an Indian, or a bunch of them, as sure as you're sitting there. Reid would do anything to protect them, even hang me. I objected from the start to their investigating this thing. They were prejudiced to begin with. I knew what they would do.

"But I can't let them go any farther. Reid says he's quit. I don't know why he should and I don't believe he has. He's only laying low, thinking he can catch me at something else."

"But that's not enough reason for their fastening it on you," objected Geggie, "just to save an Indian. They'd say they couldn't find out and let it drop."

"But look here. If they really wanted to see that justice was obtained, why didn't they make an effort to get in the police. Have they? Not a thing. It's nearly twenty-four hours since the murder and they haven't even suggested that some one go out for the authorities."

"But they saw it couldn't be done when I got back."

"But you know and they know that it can be done if it's necessary. You didn't go on because it would have meant a long, hard trip, and there was not enough need for it. You know that if it were absolutely necessary for you to get out to Abiwin you could do it now or any other time."

Geggie's unwavering glance remained on Baynes's face and he made no comment whatever.

"Now see here," continued his employer, speaking in a low tone and leaning forward until he was close to Geggie. "I have to do something to save myself from these two. I should have done it immediately, and I wish I had. But now I'm going to. I'm going to send you out, Tom. You get to Abiwin, or any other place on the railroad, and don't come back until you do. You know the bush and how to travel. You can do it if any one can.

"And, when you're out, wait until the police come and then bring them here. I'm going to take hold of things myself from now on and I'll keep hold of them until you get back with the police. Then we'll make a search of these Indians' camps around here and we'll find our foxes and the one who killed Ball."

Geggie continued to stare. Baynes

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searched his face for an instant but could read nothing in the impassive features or cold, steady eyes.

"What's the matter?" he demanded irritably. "Won't you go?"

"You're new to the bush, Mr. Baynes, and you don't know exactly what you're asking," was the reply. "You think because the ice is good here on Beaver House Lake it's good everywhere. But the snow's been going fast and the warm water's running into the lakes and rivers. It's cutting the ice out quicker than sun can, and in the little lakes it ain't safe and in the rivers it's all gone."

"You don't mean to say that a man couldn't get out to the railroad if he wanted to?" demanded Baynes.

"A man can do anything in the bush if he wants to do it bad enough. And I'm not saying I won't go. Only I want you to understand it ain't any usual trip to Abiwin. The man who starts may never get there because he'll never get anywhere again."

They had been talking in whispers and twice Baynes had glanced back at the door to Myra's room. He thought he heard her moving about and, rising, beckoned to Geggie to follow him into the kitchen.

"Paquette's gone back to the men's camp," he whispered as he looked around. "Now, Tom, I don't want you to take any unnecessary risks, but you can see what depends on your going."

"Oh, I'll go, all right," was the ready answer. "I didn't mean I wouldn't. Only, I want you to know it's a risky trip on ice like it is now. It's not freezing yet—with the breeze still on and the clouds low. It's going to be ——, walking in the slush, and no ice will be safe after I leave Beaver House.

"But you've been decent to me since I've been here and I appreciate it. I don't see the use in making this trip. They can't prove this against you any more than against any one else. Not in a court, anyhow. But if you want the police I'll do what I can to get them here. I just want you to know it's taking chances, is all, with the ice the way it is."

"Good!" exclaimed Baynes. "I'll not forget this, Tom, and I'm not afraid for you. You're too old a hand in the bush to get caught."

"It's the old hands that most always gets it," was the curt reply.

Geggie turned at once to the pantry and began to select what food he needed. He tied it up in an empty flour-sack and then went to the wood-box in the corner, from which he lifted a small ax.

"Anything else you need?" asked Baynes.

"No, this is enough."

"Well, good luck, Tom."

Geggie did not answer but opened the door, slipped out and was gone.

CHAPTER XIII

MURDER NO. 2

BAYNES returned to the living-room and went on through to his own bedroom, the window of which faced the west. He saw the foreman already out on the ice and turning toward the south. For a moment he watched him and then went back to the living-room.

Myra, white-faced, red-eyed, sat near the stove. Her father stopped as if expecting a question, but she did not even look up. When she spoke she did not even refer to Geggie having been there.

"Did every one have supper?" she asked.

"All except Reid. He didn't come over."

"Why not? He must have something to eat."

"He's asleep in the men's camp."

"Asleep! Then he really is not watching us?"

"He said he would until his trapper friend came back but I guess he didn't do even that much. Anyhow Stritt and Geggie came over to supper and he didn't try to stop them."

They sat in silence for a long time, Myra motionless before the stove, her father beside the table, staring through the window into the darkness. An hour went by. Two hours, and still neither had spoken. Myra's figure had the quiescence of sleep. Occasionally Baynes drummed nervously with his fingers on the table.

"I think I'll go to bed," said Myra at last as she rose to her feet.

She started toward her door and then stopped.

"I don't see any use in keeping those foxes hidden in the swamp," she said.

"Why not?" demanded her father in surprise.

"Foster knows they are there and so do

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Mr. Reid and his friend. There is no further need in keeping them out of sight. If they were back in the main pens they could all be fed at once."

"But the cubs?"

"In view of all that has happened, I don't see the necessity of keeping them hidden. They have caused enough trouble as it is."

"Very well," said Baynes. "I'll go down to the swamp and take them over tonight. If any one asks about them tomorrow, after finding them in the main pens, I'll explain."

"But why tonight?" objected Myra.

"As good a time as any," answered her father as he reached for his hat. "There might not be time tomorrow."

When he had gone Myra put out the light and sat down at the window. She saw her father cross the clearing to the trail to the pens and then settled to watch the scene before her.

There was no light in the men's camp. The dark, bare spots on the south sides of the buildings, the black stumps thrust out through the snow, the mud-blackened trails, all were visible against the white background, even though the night were dark.

But, so far as Myra could tell, the place was deserted. She watched automatically, her thoughts on many things in connection with what had happened in the last twenty-four hours. Time slipped by unheeded. The room grew cold, but she did not notice it.

Then like a flash in the sky a big, bright star shone through an opening in the clouds. It startled Myra from what had become a reverie and she arose instantly and lighted a lamp. In the stillness of the room the clock's ticking obtruded itself as it unaccountably does at times, and she turned to look at it.

Instantly she started toward the door and opened it. Her father had been gone nearly two hours. Half that time at the most should have sufficed for his errand. An unreasoning terror seized her and she ran down the steps from the veranda.

There was only one thought in Myra's mind. Her father had gone down the trail to the fox pens and he had not returned. Ball had gone down that trail the night before and had been killed there. John had gone down and had been attacked.

As she started across the clearing she began to run, at first with short, quick steps, then as fast as she could. The next instant she burst into the dark living-room of the men's camp.

"Mr. Reid!" she called. "Mr. Reid! Are you here?"

There was a movement beside her in the darkness. A match was struck and she saw Paquette's face beside it as he lighted the lamp.

"Is Mr. Reid here?" Myra demanded. "Call him! Quick!"

"In there," said Paquette, pointing to the room Ball had occupied.

The bullcook was still sleepy, dazed by the sudden interruption of his slumbers and when he did not move Myra ran across the room and knocked on John's door.

"What's the matter?" that young man demanded drowsily.

"Get up! Hurry, please!" called Myra. "Something's happened.

The door swung open instantly, for John had not undressed when he lay down.

"What is it?" he repeated.

"Something has happened to father. He left nearly two hours ago. Went down to the pens. He hasn't come back."

John glanced quickly at Paquette.

"Did you see him?" he asked.

"No," confessed the bullcook. "I guess I go to sleep."

John turned and threw open Stritt's door, then Geggie's. Both rooms were empty.

"Every one's gone!" he exclaimed. "When did they go, Paquette?"

"They go when I sleep."

John picked up a lantern from the corner and lit it.

"I'll take you back to your house, Miss Baynes, and then I'll go down to the pens and see if they are there," he said.

"Let me go, too?"

John remembered what Paquette had found there only that morning and shook his head.

"No," he answered. "I can go more quickly alone."

Together they hurried to the Baynes house. John did not stop but, as soon as Myra had stepped onto the veranda, turned without a word. The girl stood watching him until the lantern was hidden by the brush on the side of the trail.

Even then she did not go in. The sky was clearing rapidly and the temperature had dropped. But she did not mind the cold as she looked across the bay, trying to

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catch a glimpse of John's light before he reached the pens.

But the time slipped by and she did not see it, either directly through an opening or reflected on the tops of the spruces near the pens. The cold struck through and she shivered, and again terror, sudden, overwhelming terror, came to her. She leaned back against the log wall of the house, suddenly unnerved by the possibilities for evil the trail to the pens possessed.

And then as quickly and as unexpectedly as the star which had aroused her before, a lantern flashed out of the brush where John had disappeared. Rapidly it moved toward her and she could see the legs of a man twinkling beside it, the shadows moving, in long, crisscross leaps on the snow at one side.

The swiftness of the approach served only to renew Myra's terror. She had started forward at the first sight of the lantern, but now she again drew back, only to lean against the door and send it flying open. The light from the lamp streamed out and into it rushed John, the white bandage above his white face.

"Did you find him?" cried Myra.

"No, there was no one there, not at the pens or on the trail."

"Not there!"

"No, the place was deserted so far as I could see. Except—. Except—. Miss Baynes, there has been another murder on the island tonight, within the last hour or so. I found a body there beside the shanty, right where Ball's lay. It was an Indian woman, a squaw."

CHAPTER XIV

MYRA DECLARES HERSELF

MYRA did not speak. The light was at her back and John could not see her face, could not read the uncensored message that it flashed from her first thoughts. Her father was gone, had broken bounds, and there had been another murder.

She turned and went into the living-room. John followed and closed the door. When he first saw Myra's face in the light he knew only that she was afraid. Naturally he believed the fear was of this dread mystery, of these inexplicable slayings which seemed to follow as certainly as night came.

And as naturally he thought first that he must protect her, that she must be removed from all possibility of harm from whatever it was, or whoever it was, that prowled about the island with a lust to kill. And as naturally, too, he forgot all that had passed between them, all his doubts and lack of faith, even the hatred he had seen in her eyes. To John, Myra was a woman, a woman needing protection, a woman he desired to protect more than he desired anything.

John himself was not unaffected by the tragedy he had just discovered. Unfamiliar as he was with death, it was not finding the body of the squaw so much as the significance of her death that unnerved him. Some one, undoubtedly deranged, was at large on the island. Some one of the little colony had taken two lives, might at any moment take a third.

"Miss Baynes," he said, "I'm going to take you away from here. It is not safe for you to remain. None of us knows who may be the next one. I'm going to take you to my cabin. You can stay there until this thing is ended."

"But I can't go and leave father. I can't desert him at a time like this."

"You are not deserting him. He is not here. We don't even know where he is. I searched all around the pens and there was no one there. And I won't leave you alone while I search further. I'll take you to my cabin and come right back. Then, as soon as there is news of him, I'll get it to you."

Myra made no objection to this and John continued:

"It has cleared off and turned cold so the crust on the lake must be solid by this time. The five miles will be easy for you. Is there anything you wish to take? I have plenty of food there."

Myra, apparently willing now to act on any suggestion, turned to her room. When she reappeared she had a little packsack filled with clothing. John took it from her hands and led the way to the door. Then he stopped suddenly and faced her.

"You're all in and I'm not feeling any too fit myself," he said. "I'm going over to Stritt's room for a minute and get something to brace us up if we need it. A drink is a poor thing to travel on, but it helps at the end. I'll be back in a minute."

"No, no!" she cried, grasping his arm. "Let me go with you!"

John blew out the lamp on the table and, with his lantern, lighted the way to the men's

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camp. Paquette still sat by the table but John did not even look at him as he passed through to the bedroom occupied by Stritt.

"Do you mean you are going to get his liquor?" asked Myra as he began to search through a packsack, a suit-case and a box which served as a dressing-table.

John looked up, startled by the sudden animation and by a new purpose that he had caught in her tone.

"Yes," he answered.

"Don't leave any of it!" she exclaimed fiercely. "Break the bottles! Pour it out! Don't leave any!"

Myra was bending down beside him, lifting clothing from the suit-case, throwing it heedlessly behind her.

"It was the liquor that did it!" she declared. "Absinth makes another person of him."

John, realizing for the first time what she meant, watched carefully lest Myra find a bottle and break it. He was perfectly willing that it be destroyed but he first wanted enough to take with him for emergencies. When he saw that there was no possibility of a bottle being hidden under the few shirts that remained in the suit-case, he turned to the packsack across the room. He had not unbuckled the first strap, however, before a low, sharp exclamation came from Myra. As he whirled he saw her drawing a long, dark, furry object from beneath the last of the clothing.

"What is it?" he demanded as he reached for the lantern.

Myra did not answer but only held the object close to the light.

"It's a black fox-skin!" cried John as he bent down and looked at the beautiful pelt.

Then he glanced at Myra. The girl was looking steadily at him, her eyes plainly asking the question: "Don't you understand?"

"Not Black Hector!" he exclaimed. "Then it was Stritt who stole the foxes!"

There was a sound behind them and both whirled toward the door to see Paquette standing there, his eyes wide, awe-stricken, riveted to the fur.

"You saw where Miss Baynes found that?" asked John when he recovered from the shock Paquette had given him.

The Frenchman nodded, his eyes still on the pelt Myra held beside the lantern.

"Did you ever see it before, just the skin?"

Paquette shook his head.

"Is it Black Hector's?"

"I don't know. Maybe. It fine skin, like his."

John turned to Myra and as their eyes met each realized that the other had been thinking the same thing. Somehow their thoughts seemed so completely in accord the young man did not think it necessary to explain his first remark:

"Geggie told me Stritt was broke, hadn't a cent, couldn't even leave here if he wished. Ball told me he had spent all his money except what was invested in the fox-farm. And there is Black Hector's skin. It is all clear now."

"And Mr. Ball, and you, and the Indian woman!"

Myra's horror as she repeated the list turned instantly to joy.

"And father! He had nothing to do with it!"

But her reference to her father brought a realization of his absence, of the fact that he had left more than two hours before to go to the pens and that he had not returned. The girl dropped the skin of the black fox to the floor and grasped John's arm.

"You don't think he has killed father, too?" she demanded. "Did you look everywhere down there?"

"I looked everywhere and there was no sign of him," was the answer.

Baynes and his part in the fox-farm mystery had flashed through John's mind as well as Myra's, but the thought was clothed in another light. There came to him clearly the many things which had indicated that Stritt and Baynes were together in whatever had been done on the island. But he did not let Myra see anything of this when he reassured her.

"I wouldn't worry about your father. I feel sure nothing has happened to him and that he will be here in the morning. But in the meantime I am going to take you to my cabin. We think we have solved this mystery with the finding of this skin in Stritt's room, but we may be wrong. Until we know definitely we can't take any chances, and until we are certain you must be in a safe place."

"But I must know about father."

"I'll come and tell you or send Paquette as soon as I find him. But we haven't found the absinth."

John resumed his search of Stritt's pack

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and at last drew a bottle, wrapped in a heavy shirt, from the bottom. Then he felt of the mattress and of the bedding, looked under the bunk and in every place where anything might have been hidden.

"This seems to be all," he said as he held the bottle up to the light. "And it's whisky, not absinth, which is better for us. Now we'll go."

PAQUETTE had left them and as they went out they saw him leaning over the lamp in the living-room. The next instant they were in darkness. John felt Myra's hands on his left arm and immediately shoved her back into the bedroom and himself ducked to one side as if expecting an attack. But there was no sound, not a moment.

"Paquette!" he exclaimed. "What does this mean? Where are you?"

"S-s-s-t!" came a low warning. And then in a whisper John heard Paquette saying:

"Some one he come. Out on the lake. Listen."

John walked carefully to the door. The light crunch of the hard, brittle, sand-like snow out on the bay came to him, and as his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light of the stars he saw a figure hurrying toward the shore.

"Who is it, Paquette?" he asked in a whisper when the bullcook joined him.

"Me no know. Maybe it Twilight."

In silence they waited. John felt Myra beside him.

"It's Foster, Foster Stritt," she whispered as the figure climbed the low bank and came across the clearing directly toward them. "He has a pack on his back."

The man came more slowly, occasionally glancing back toward the Baynes cabin, now stopping to look at the men's camp. At a signal from John the others had drawn back and the door stood open, the dark interior behind it. The man stepped into the room, and instantly John had grasped his arms from behind.

"The light, Miss Baynes!" he called. "Paquette, help me here."

But there was no need for help.

"What melodrama is this?" came in Stritt's cool voice.

Myra found a match on the table and lighted the lamp. As his prisoner did not struggle, John dropped his arms. Stritt looked around, smiling.

"Hadn't I better take you over to your house, Myra," he suggested.

"No," she declared angrily. "Don't even speak to me."

Stritt shot a quick glance at John before he replied easily:

"Come, come, Myra. Something has happened which has upset you. Let me take you home. You need sleep, dear."

"Don't speak to me!" cried the girl, furious because of the last word. "Something *has* upset me. You know what it is, and now we know."

She crossed over to John's side and stood with him, facing Stritt. But that young man only smiled easily.

"Our detective friend has some new clues?" he asked.

"That's enough, Stritt," John advised calmly. "There is some new evidence, and I think there is some more in your pack. Open it up."

Stritt glanced quickly into his bedroom, the door of which was open. As he saw the open pack he laughed.

"Yes, I have some more," he said as he lowered his burden to the floor.

"Open it, Paquette," commanded John, and he and Myra watched intently. That the skin of Black Hector's mate at least was in the pack they did not doubt. They were wholly unprepared when the bullcook drew out a bulky object wrapped in a mackinaw coat. The coat immediately fell away and they saw a gallon jug.

Without a word John reached down and picked it up. With his knife he pried open the cork, smelled of the contents and then deliberately poured some out onto the floor.

"Stop that!" exclaimed Stritt as he strode forward.

"Stand back!" commanded John roughly. "It's absinth, Miss Baynes."

Myra took the jug from his hands and walked to the door. The three men in the room saw her lift it and the next moment heard it crash on the bare, frozen ground outside. Stritt started toward, a cry of protest breaking from his lips, but John caught an arm and whirled him about.

"See here!" he said angrily. "We've stood enough from you. You're going to keep bounds from now on. Paquette, bring me a rope."

"I hardly think you'll go that far," said Stritt, making an effort to speak calmly.

"I am justified in going to most any

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lengths after what has happened tonight down at the pens. I'm going to tie you up so you can't escape, and I'm going to place a guard over you, too."

With Paquette's help John tied Stritt's hands securely behind him. He was not considerate of the soft skin on the man's wrists and he drew the knots up with a wrench that brought a protest from the prisoner.

"Myra, you are not going to stand there and see them do this to me?" he exclaimed.

"I agree with Mr. Reid that you should be closely watched," she answered.

"You are making a big mistake, a bigger mistake than you realize," he retorted threateningly. "You remember what I told you this afternoon."

"I choose to forget anything you have ever said to me," the girl declared fiercely.

"Walk into your room," interrupted John, and he pushed Stritt before him and shoved him over onto his bed. There he quickly tied his feet, looping the free ends of the rope around one leg of the home-made bunk and tying them again.

"Come here, Paquette," he commanded as he walked into the living-room and out through the door.

"Now you know what Stritt is," he whispered when they were outside together. "You saw that fox skin. I found a dead squaw at the pens a little while ago, right where you found Ball. There has been another murder. Stritt was away. You are not to take any chances. I told you before there was a madman loose on the island. But you went to sleep. If you go to sleep again Stritt will kill you. I'm going to leave this revolver with you. If he gets loose, shoot him. Don't let him escape. And if he does I'll shoot you when I get back."

He saw that he had Paquette thoroughly frightened, frightened enough to remain awake, and when the man began to protest his faithfulness he shoved him back into the cabin and called to Myra.

"I'm ready, Miss Baynes. We can start now."

She followed him out into the darkness and together they crossed the clearing and went down onto the ice.

"This is good going," said John as he felt the hard surface of the crust beneath his feet. "We can get there in less than an hour and a half."

THEY walked rapidly and in silence for a mile. John, since the discovery of the fox-skin in Stritt's suit-case, had forgotten his injury, his weakness. He had unconsciously drawn on his nerve force for his strength and he felt no weariness, no debilitation.

The excitement following his finding the squaw's body and the discovery of the evidence against Stritt accounted for the first stimulus, but now as he and Myra hurried on side by side he felt another and greater form of intoxication, one which, he believed would carry him on through anything.

Now that he had time to value incidents of the last hour, their significance came to him. Myra had called first upon him before she knew that Stritt or Geggie were gone. From the moment she had wakened him until they had left the men's camp together she had reposed perfect confidence in his every decision. She had made no effort to conceal her opinion of Stritt and she had taken sides against him without an instant's hesitation.

In his elation John forgot the scene in the Baynes living-room before supper-time. He forgot even his own declaration that he would have nothing more to do with the fox-farm and its mystery. He only knew that Myra had appealed to him to help her, that she had grasped his arm and hung to it, that she depended upon him, and that he was taking her to a place of safety.

Wholly without warrant, too, John felt something symbolic in this journey to his forest home. They, they together, alone, were going there. The fox-farm and its mysteries and tragedies were lost on the lake behind them. The western shore showed as a faint, dark line far in the distance. Out where they were was a world all their own. All about them was a circle, a dim, small circle that drew them together and shut out the rest of the world completely. John, his muscles quickened by his fancies, stepped out quickly. He seemed to be walking on air, there beside her.

Whatever swiftness was given to Myra's feet in that first mile was due rather to the relief in knowing that the island and its dread mysteries were being left behind. To her the little circle formed by the darkness pressing so closely about them was rather a symbol of the unknown to which she was going, which the morning might bring. She was leaving because she, too, had felt the

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danger in the steady cycle of tragedies which had come to the island. It was a momentary expedient. Of what would come after, of what she should do, she had not thought.

And as the night and the vast silence of the great lake pressed closer and she felt that she could walk forever on the snow without reaching anything, the same fear came to her that had come to John but which he had not expressed. What if Stritt and her father were working together?

The thought persisted despite her efforts to drive it out. Her anxiety for her father gave way to a dread of what his absence that night might portend. Unconsciously she voiced the sequence of events.

"First Mr. Ball, then you, then the squaw."

John was too greatly elated to keep any secrets from Myra.

"No one attacked me," he said.

"No one! Why, how can that be? I found you there on the trail unconscious. Some one did it."

Briefly John sketched the affair as Twilight had discovered it had happened. He told even how the pine stub had been undercut so that it would fall across the fences of both the inner and outer pens.

"Then that means a systematic attempt to rob us!" cried Myra, her relief sudden and overwhelming. "Father has been right all along. Some one has been trying to steal our foxes. This proves it. Now we can find out and clear father of suspicion in the Ball murder."

"How is that?" asked John.

"Don't you see? We have suspected this for some time, have been watching and guarding against it. Now we have the proof that it was being done, though it had to come after we had lost fifty thousand dollars' worth of foxes."

"And you think Stritt is at the bottom of this?"

"I don't know what to think. I had never suspected such a thing until we found that skin in his bag tonight."

John stopped abruptly and grasped Myra's arm, bringing her, too, to a sudden halt and swinging her around.

"That skin!" he exclaimed. "I never thought of it before! It is not freshly killed. It is a dry skin. And Black Hector was stolen only last night."

"You are right," replied Myra, who had caught the significance of the fact at once. "It couldn't be Black Hector."

In the darkness they stared at each other. To John had come the recollection of the feigned surprise of both Myra and her father when Twilight had told them that the ten-thousand-dollar pair had been stolen.

"It must be one of the others, one of the second best pair," he exclaimed involuntarily.

For an instant Myra returned his stare. Then she turned and went on.

For a while John did not speak. This admission of what he felt to be true brought the old disturbance, the old misgivings, the old lack of faith. His doubts rushed in. He met them with the new evidence gained that night, tried to overthrow them, stamp them as impossible, but they continued to overwhelm him. And then as he plunged on, wondering, doubting, trying to believe, he felt the soft pressure of Myra's mittened hand at his elbow.

"Listen, Mr. Reid," she said. "I know what you are thinking. I know you discovered those foxes in the swamp. And I wish that I could explain it to you now. But I can't. Not until later, until I see father. In the meantime I'm going to ask you to believe me that they have nothing to do with what has happened since you came to the island this morning, or with Mr. Ball's murder."

John did not reply. He believed with Myra's first sentence, but he could not bring himself to say so. Her hand was still on his arm and he felt that to speak would be to cause its removal.

"I'm sorry," she went on. "I wish I could explain all that. It's so absurdly simple and harmless, only, with all the other things that have happened, it has assumed such terrible proportions."

They were close together. Her face looked up into his. In the starlight and reflection from the snow he could see the tense, pleading features, the eyes that begged his trust and belief.

"I would believe anything you say, Myra!" he cried impetuously. "Against anything I saw or heard or knew to be true, I would believe you. I—I——"

His arms swept out and around her, but before he could draw her to him she had slipped away.

"No, no! Not now!" she whispered as she started on. "Not now!"

John felt that he was soaring along over the surface of the lake. "Not now," she

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had said, and in the promise of the words and the tone his spirits expanded until he felt that something within him would burst. Quite consciously he tightened the muscles of his chest, experiencing a vague fear that if he relaxed his joy would explode and tear him apart physically.

He did not speak again, did not attempt even to take up the conversation which had been interrupted. He felt a strange content to wait, and that content embraced a certitude that soon the dread mystery would be explained and he would be free to claim that which he knew now to be his.

THE western shore drew closer and at last John, after straining his eyes for a moment, exclaimed confidently:

"We'll be there soon. That white pine that shows above the black shore-line marks the end of the portage."

"And is it far from there?" asked Myra.

"Only half a mile. My cabin is on the next little lake."

They came to the shore, found the portage trail and entered the darkness of the forest. John went ahead, Myra close at his heels. The trail twisted and turned but it was well beaten and frozen solidly and they walked with little difficulty.

"Some one is there!" whispered Myra excitedly.

John stopped and looked.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"I saw a light."

He went on a little farther and then stopped as he, too, caught the gleam of a light through the trees.

"I wonder who that can be," he said. "And at this time of night. It must be nearly two o'clock."

They went on until the trail turned and led straight to the cabin and they could see the lighted window plainly.

"It's Twilight, of course," said John as he started forward more rapidly. "He must have come this way and is getting something to eat before going back to the fox-farm."

They went on, their leather-topped rubbers crunching and grinding on the trail. And then suddenly the light went out.

"He's just leaving," said John. "We'll meet him at the door."

They heard the door open. Then a dark figure slipped out and around the corner.

"It's some one running away!" cried John as he sprang forward.

"Father! Father!" called Myra. "Father!"

"How did you know?" demanded John as they both ran on to the door.

"I would know him anywhere," she panted. "It was father," and again she called to him.

Instantly Baynes appeared from around the corner of the cabin. Quite openly he came toward them but there was no greeting until they had stopped before him.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded of his daughter.

His voice was calm but there was an indication of repression in his manner.

"Mr. Reid brought me," she answered. "He thought it wasn't safe on the island any more. There was another murder tonight, father."

Baynes did not speak. John had opened the door and his exclamation instantly attracted the attention of the others.

"What's this?" he demanded. "Foxes! In here!"

He ran into the room and struck a match as he reached the table. As the lamp lighted up the cabin his eyes swept around until they stopped at the first unfamiliar object.

"What is it?" asked Myra, who had followed him.

"Look," and John pointed to four small crates that were piled, two high, against the rear wall. The front of each crate was slatted and bound with strips of tin and wire, and through the slats of each shone the yellow light of a pair of eyes.

"Black Hector!" cried Myra in astonishment. "Black Hector and his mate and the second pair!"

She whirled and looked at her father, who had followed them into the room. She found him confronting John, the two men staring at each other.

"What is it?" demanded Myra as she caught the intensity of the glances and the questions they asked.

"Mr. Baynes," began John with a most evident effort to control his voice, "I hope you can explain how these foxes happen to be in my house and you here with them, the foxes that were stolen from the island."

"Explain!" blazed Baynes, his face purple, his voice pitched so high the word ended

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in a scream. "I'll explain! I've caught you! I've nailed it on you at last!"

"It seems," retorted John, "that I have nailed it on you."

The fox-farm head choked, spluttered, gasped and shook his fist in John's face.

"You young crook!" he cried at last. "You were clever and you almost succeeded. But I caught you. I spoiled your game. You thought you could fasten this thing on me to save your Indian friends. I didn't even suspect you were doing it to save yourself as well."

He turned to his daughter as he went on.

"Don't you see, Myra? He happened to get to the island just at the right time yesterday, and the first time, too, he had been there in a year. He is the brains behind this attempt to steal our foxes. He is the brains and the Indians are his tools. And they killed Ball and they stole fifty thousand dollars' worth of foxes and they would have gotten clean away with it if I hadn't come here tonight."

"Mr. Baynes," John interrupted sternly, "stop talking nonsense. You don't seem to realize that I have found you here with the stolen property from the island, nor do you seem to realize that your accusations are so utterly absurd that they assume the nature of a subterfuge on your part."

"Listen to him bluff!" cried Baynes excitedly. "You see don't you, Myra? We've caught him at last."

Myra looked at him steadily, searchingly, and for the first time Baynes's excitement vanished and he was calm.

"You see, don't you?" he repeated uncertainly.

"I see," she answered defiantly, and as she spoke she walked to John's side and, shoulder to shoulder with the young man, faced her father.

"I see the utter injustice of your accusations," she continued. "John could no more be guilty of such a thing than a man on the other side of the world. He brought me here tonight because it was no longer safe on the island, because there has been a second murder there, one of which you seem to know, and because he sought to protect me from what we had both come to dread. He would not have brought me here if he had hidden Black Hector and the others in his cabin. He knew no more of their being here than I did. It is for you to explain, not John."

CHAPTER XV

"WHATEVER THE TRUTH"

LIKE a giant roller mounting overwhelmingly in shoal water, only to be robbed of its power by a slightly submerged reef, John Reid's exultation, as Myra stood beside him and rebuked, even defied, her father, vanished when he realized what her action meant. Her faith and her hope, her confident trust, were shattered in the face of what they had found. The parent for whom she had sacrificed so much had failed her.

It seemed inhumanly monstrous to John, this wrecking of a brave girl's confidence, and, though he had strongly suspected Baynes from the first, he now revolted against the conditions that his actual guilt made inevitable. Half in protest against such a possibility, half in pity for Myra, he turned to her in an effort to alleviate somewhat what he knew she must suffer.

"Let's not rush at conclusions," he said gently. "We haven't all the facts yet. Remember we found that skin in Stritt's packsack. There may be, there must be, some mistake, somewhere."

They stood together in the middle of the room facing the door. Baynes, who had followed them in, stood with his back to it. His belligerency had not recovered from the shock of Myra's refusal to join him against the young ethnologist. But as John and Myra glanced up at him they saw that something else now occupied his attention, that surprise and fear and rage were again driving him into one of the ungovernable fits of passion which both knew so well.

Yet his eyes showed that something new, something different, was the cause. He was staring past them, toward the rear of the room. They wheeled together to see Twilight Jack in the door of the little kitchen.

"You!" cried John. "You brought these foxes here!"

The trapper only nodded as he stepped into the room and sat down beside the stove. Apparently without interest in the subject, he began to pull on and lace his leather-topped rubbers.

"I borrowed a pair of dry socks off you, lad," he remarked casually as he bent over his feet. "Mine was wet."

Neither John nor Myra spoke. Twilight Jack had not indicated by word or action

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what his hiding in the kitchen had meant, where he had obtained the foxes or why he had brought them to the cabin. Yet inevitably there was borne to them a conviction that he had solved the mystery of the fox-farm. And, convinced of this, they suddenly found themselves unwilling to know the solution.

Baynes, however, did not remain silent. His rage finally overcame his surprise and he burst forth:

"That proves it! He admits he brought them here. I knew he did anyhow because I followed him. Now that he's caught he's trying to turn it against me."

"It turned itself," said Twilight calmly as he finished lacing his boots. "And your following me is one of the things I planned on. Only I didn't know until you came into the cabin whether it was you or Stritt or Geggie that would be following these foxes."

"Planned it!" ejaculated Baynes.

"Yes," answered the trapper shortly, and then he turned to John.

"You said something about another murder, lad. Who was it?"

"A squaw. I think it was the one who lived across the Beaver House Lake portage, though I never saw her before."

"Not her!" exclaimed Twilight, and for the first time since he had undertaken the solution of the fox-farm tangle his face betrayed his innermost thoughts. Dumbly, pleadingly, he looked at John, his eyes seeking something to refute what his ears had heard.

"I'm not sure," John hastened to add when he saw his friend's distress. "I never saw the woman. Only heard of her living there from the other Indians."

"It's her, all right," replied Twilight sadly. "And I sent her there to be killed."

"You sent her!" cried John.

"Yes, only I never thought anything like that would happen."

He turned swiftly to Baynes.

"But it caught you!" he exclaimed angrily. "It caught you and your whole bag of tricks. And I might have known that a man who would kill Ball to cover up his tracks would have killed his partner in the thieving, too."

"I never killed her!" declared Baynes.

His tone was more defensive than defiant, and as he spoke John felt Myra's hands gripping his arm. He felt certain, as he knew she did, that her father was guilty, but as before he revolted against such a thing, against what it would mean to her.

"But Jack," he protested, "how do you know? You haven't been at the pens. You don't know who did it."

"I'll be at the pens at daylight and what I see will back up what I know now," was the instant reply.

"But this squaw," objected John. "How could Mr. Baynes have been connected with her actions?"

"You remember those moccasin tracks we saw at the pens the first thing when we went down there?" asked Twilight. "We knew some one besides Baynes and Stritt and Geggie and Paquette had been there that night about the time Ball was killed. We knew it wasn't a man but some woman wearing Indian moccasins."

He stopped and turned an embarrassed face toward Myra.

"And you thought it was I!" cried the girl.

"We didn't think," corrected Twilight. "We didn't know who it might be, only you were the only one to fit the tracks. Afterward when I got to see several other things I remembered there was an Indian woman living at the south end of the lake, one who'd come in only last Fall and was living there all alone. Just because I didn't want to take any chances I went down to her cabin.

"By that time it was thawed so I couldn't tell whether she had come up to the island the night before or not, but I took the chance she did. I stopped at her shack for supper and right away I noticed she wasn't any ordinary squaw, not like they are around here.

"Well, I talked about the weather and everything else that's harmless for an hour and then I told her I was going to town to get a policeman because a man at the fox-farm had been killed, or nearly killed. I said he'd come to and told how a squaw did it and how she would hang sure unless she went to see John first. I told her John could get any Indian out of a hole."

Twilight stopped suddenly, overcome by embarrassment. Then he plunged on with his story.

"I told her about all the men at the fox-farm and I made up a lot of what they said and did. But she never let on she knew one of them and after a while I left."

"What did you tell her about me?" thundered Baynes.

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Twilight looked up, a grin on his face, a twinkle in his eyes.

"I told her you were thinking of getting married, that a woman was coming up from the States to marry you."

"How dared you say such a thing?"

Twilight's mouth straightened and the laughter was gone from his eyes.

"It seemed to work," he said coldly, "though worse than I ever thought it would. But that ain't all, and I hope you'll overlook it, Miss Baynes."

He turned toward Myra with the guilty countenance of a boy.

"Overlook what?" she demanded in bewilderment.

"Well, you see, I had to make a good story, so I told how Geggie and Stritt both was saying they was going to marry you. I kind of had to take in them all, you see."

"But why?" she demanded.

"I'll go on and tell the rest and you can see. After I'd told her all that I went on across the lake and across the next portage to where I knew an Indian had his wigwam. I wrote a note to Dave Hogan and told the Indian to get through with it if he had to swim the rivers, and that he wasn't to come back until he brought the police. He told me two policemen were within ten miles of him that noon looking for somebody they heard was pedling whisky to the Indians and he could get them.

"That was good news and I turned back to the squaw's shack. As I sort of expected, she wasn't there. I sneaked up in the dark and made sure there was no one in the cabin. I knew she had gone to the island and that whoever she went to was the man. I was going to follow right along when I got to thinking I had better look around first, two pairs of foxes being gone, so I followed a trail out into the brush and found these."

He pointed to the four crates against the wall behind him.

"And she was the thief!" exclaimed John.

"Only partly. You see, she went up to the island to see you and tell you she wasn't the one who killed Ball. She was afraid because I said Ball had told that a squaw hit him. When she got there she met whoever was in with her and there was a row. That's how she come to be killed."

Twilight stopped speaking and not even Baynes broke the silence. There was genuine grief, genuine distress, in the trapper's face.

"I ought to have followed her through," he muttered. "Then I would have stopped it."

Absently he reached for his pipe in a hip pocket and struck a match.

"But I found the stolen foxes and I guess there's an end of this murdering!" he exclaimed suddenly, turning to Baynes as he spoke. "And now, Mr. Baynes, you've got seven pairs of foxes where you only had six to begin with."

IT WAS a question, a threat, a challenge, and Baynes remained silent as Twilight looked at him. The trapper was about to continue when a barely audible gasp from Myra made him turn. The grim lines faded from his face and a greater compassion shone from his eyes than when he had spoken of the death of the squaw. Slightly embarrassed, he pulled out his watch.

"I guess we'd better mooch, lad," he said, "if we want to get to the island by daylight. Mike can haul Black Hector and his mate and the other two we'll have to leave here. The best ones will be safe anyhow, and we want to be down there at the pens as soon as we can see tracks."

"And we'll all go with you?" asked John with a glance at Myra.

"I'm not going," the girl replied quickly. "I'm going to stay here. Father will go with you."

"But why should you stay?" demanded Baynes.

"I'd rather," she answered without looking at him. "I'd rather wait here."

John caught her real meaning and hastened to her aid.

"She hasn't had any sleep and it has been a strenuous day and night. And it's too far for her to walk now. She can sleep here and I can come after her later."

Twilight had picked up the crate in which Black Hector was imprisoned and carried it out through the door. John took the other and followed. Baynes, who had found a seat on a bench, appeared to be completely crushed. He sat hunched over, his elbows on his knees, staring at the floor between his feet.

Myra took a quick step toward him and then turned and went to the window facing the east. Her hands gripped the sill but the tension did not stop entirely the shaking of her shoulders. Outside she heard the

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voice of Twilight as he called his dog, heard the trapper and John lashing the crates to the little toboggan. Then the door opened and John entered.

Instinctively he started toward the girl. His love and his pity, her suffering so poignantly his, made him forget all else. But half-way across the room he realized that even his love for her did not permit intrusion now. Nothing he could say, nothing he could do, would alleviate in the least the torture of the moment.

He turned abruptly, touched Baynes on the shoulder and led the way to the door. The big man followed obediently. Not once did he look back. Not a word did he say. He stepped out into the darkness and the cold and waited until Twilight had started on with his dog. Immediately he fell in behind the toboggan, his feet shuffling and crunching on the frozen snow.

John took a step after him and then whirled and re-entered the cabin. Myra had left the window and stood beside the stove, warming her hands. Though she looked squarely at him she did not seem to see John as he closed the door.

"Myra!" he exclaimed, for the vacant gaze had brought sudden fear for her reason. "Myra!"

Her eyes focused upon him and the expression of vacancy gave way to one of helpless pleading.

"If I can," John answered the thought.

Just a suggestion of a smile, more a fleeting expression of a hope desired but unattainable, came to the girl's eyes. Again John read her thought, saw that she knew he would do only what he believed to be right.

"Myra!" he declared suddenly. "I'll wipe out the tracks. I'll do anything to keep this from you."

"No," she answered sadly. "Don't you see that would never do? It's got to be the truth, John. I've got to have the truth. The truth can't be harder than this suspense."

She took a faltering step toward him. If her spirit remained steadfast, the strength seemed to have gone from her body.

"And come and tell me," she added in a whisper. "Just as soon as you can."

Impulsively John strode to her, for she was swaying now. But with unexpected energy she started backward and held out a fending hand.

"Not now," she said. "When you come."

A question was on John's lips. He held it back. But he could not keep it from his eyes.

"Whatever you find," she answered.

CHAPTER XVI

TWILIGHT FINDS "THAT ONE LITTLE THING"

JOHN did not overtake Twilight Jack and Baynes until he had reached the lake. The trapper was still in the lead, Mike drawing the toboggan behind him and the head of the fox-farm bringing up the rear. When Baynes heard John at his heels he stopped and faced him.

"For the last time," he said, "I want to warn you not to try to fasten this thing on me. I never killed Ball, I never stole a fox, and I never killed this squaw. That's the truth, but you won't see it. To protect your Indians, even after you know one of them was implicated in all this, you continue to try to convict me."

He had begun evenly and calmly but as he continued the bluster and anger so habitual to the man forced themselves to the front. John's silence at the end served only to arouse his passion and he shook his fist in the young man's face.

"You can't do it!" he cried in a rage. "Your contemptible scheme to get revenge on me won't work. I'll beat you yet, and when I get free from all this I'll make this country too hot for you."

"That's enough!" interrupted John so decisively that even Baynes's anger was subdued. "I've stood all that I'm going to stand from you. If you had remained sober, if you had a little control over yourself, you might not have gotten into this fix. But now you're in it and you've got to stand the consequences, whatever they are.

"And while I'm on the subject I want to explain some things to you. I don't know whether you're guilty or not. Everything seems to point to it, and if you would look at it seriously yourself you would see that you're in a tight hole. If you're not guilty you have been a fool to act the way you have since Ball was killed. If you are not guilty of the murder of Ball and of this Indian woman you have certainly done everything that you could to make it appear that you are.

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"Now as for my part in this. I did not want to have anything to do with it. Twice I wanted to give it up but both times your daughter induced me to stay. Within the last ten minutes I offered to go over to the island and wipe out any trace of your having been near the pens when the squaw was killed.

"I offered to make myself something as bad as a murderer in order to protect you. But she wouldn't have it. She said she wanted the truth. I hope it will be the truth she wishes, but whatever it is she doesn't want anything but the truth.

"Now don't make any more preposterous charges. Act like a man. We haven't proved you are guilty but you haven't proved your innocence by the nature of your talk and you never will. No one wants you proved innocent any more than I do, and when you have anything substantial to suggest I'll be glad to hear it. But in the meantime keep your temper when you speak to me."

"That's right, lad," said Twilight, who, when the others stopped, had returned to hear what they were saying. "That poor girl has suffered more from this than any one else and I'm getting tired, too, of this fellow's empty talk. He walked into my trap and in a couple of hours we'll know whether he stays there."

"I didn't understand all about this," said John, whose anger had cooled. "You didn't finish your story. What happened after you found the foxes?"

"Well, I saw that whoever was in with the squaw knew about their being there and might try to get them and clear out of the country. So I packed them through the brush to the lake and hauled them over, two at a time, to your place. While I was crossing with the second load I thought I saw some one out on the ice following me. Mike acted as though there was anyhow, and so when I got to your cabin I hid in the kitchen. Baynes got there about ten minutes before you did."

When John finished speaking Baynes had turned and gone forward without a word. While the trapper talked he sat on one of the fox crates, apparently paying no attention to what was said. When the others came and started on again he arose and walked in the rear. Once John heard him stop and turned to see him looking back toward the shore they had just left. He took a step or two, hesitated, and then turned and followed.

The wind had sprung up from the northeast when the three started out on to the lake and before they had gone a mile it was blowing hard and the sky was rapidly filling with clouds.

"No thaw today," commented Twilight as he bent his head against the gale that whipped across his face. "Break-up may not come so early after all. It means better footing anyhow."

The stars had furnished some light and a guide but when there were still three miles to go nothing except the wind served to give them their direction. The distant shoreline could not be distinguished and the island was not to be seen.

Twilight did not hesitate, however. He continued, seemingly blindly, his head down. Only John noticed he veered toward the east.

After an hour the trapper turned almost squarely to the left and the next moment John saw that he was following the Winter trail. He had not trusted the wind in finding so small a thing as the island on the great lake, but he knew that he would strike the snow-shoe path.

Dawn had come by the time they reached the fox-farm. In the early light John thought the place looked more desolate and forlorn than it did twenty-four hours earlier when he had first seen it. There was smoke, however, rising from the chimney in the men's camp and the three hurried across to the door.

Inside Paquette was sitting as John had left him. He held the revolver in his right hand and he faced the door of Stritt's room. A grateful smile spread over his face when he saw John and Twilight Jack and he arose stiffly from his seat. John opened the door and ascertained that his prisoner was still tied as he had left him. And he was sound asleep.

"Is it light enough to see down there, Twilight?" asked John after he had closed the door and returned to the others.

"We'll wait a few minutes. It's a little dark in the bush yet."

John glanced toward Baynes and back to his friend with a significant question. Baynes caught it.

"I'll do whatever you please," he said in a peculiarly chastened tone.

All the fight seemed to have gone out of

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the man. Even as he disliked him John could not but realize the tragedy of this once strong personality now crushed and broken. Only the knowledge of what Baynes's guilt would mean to Myra prevented a softening of his attitude. He was about to suggest that Baynes, too, be placed under guard in the men's camp when Twilight spoke.

"Was you ever one of those big bugs that used to come along the north shore of Superior in a yacht trout-fishing?" he asked suddenly. "Around Michipicoton and that country?"

"No," answered Baynes, whose perplexity was as great as John's because of this strange question in an easy, conversational tone.

"And was Stritt?" continued Twilight.

"No, he was never outside of a city in his life until he came up here this Winter."

"And you was never around Michipicoton, or Agawa, or any of that country between the Soo and Heron Bay?"

"No," Baynes repeated, "but what's that place? Michipicoton? I've heard that, just recently, too. I've heard some one speak the word rapidly as you have."

"Who?"

"I can't remember, but it was just this Winter."

Twilight turned abruptly to the door and opened it.

"It's plenty light enough now, lad," he said. "Let's get down to the pens and see what's there."

John hesitated and again glanced at Baynes.

"Oh, he can't get far away without our seeing him," said Twilight as he went down the steps and across the clearing.

John followed, a question on his lips as to the reasons back of the trapper's strange interrogations. But Twilight stopped suddenly and pointed to the trail as they entered the brush.

"Here's where Baynes went down to the pens, the last one, and when the snow was soft," he said. "There's his old rubber tracks plain. And there's Stritt's hobnails."

He had no more comments to make until they reached the shanty at the entrance to the outside pen.

If Twilight Jack had displayed sorrow when he heard of the death of the squaw he did not now. He turned the corner of the building and stopped short beside the body. For a moment he stood there, studying the snow and the impressions on it.

"Now I wonder," he said at last, "if Baynes could have done just what I did or whether he's cuter than we think."

"What do you mean?" asked John.

"See those tracks beyond there? Did he run around this corner quick and stumble over the woman, or was that where he had a tussle with her, or was it some one else?"

"But look here," said John, pointing to a spot about six feet beyond the squaw's body. "That looks like a box had been dropped there."

He walked around so as not to step on the tracks and bent over the clean-cut indentations in the snow.

"That's a crate, like those the foxes were in," he continued. "How could that be, Jack? The four foxes were gone before last night."

"Didn't you see where Baynes stepped off the trail on to that fallen pine stub? He brought those foxes back that he had hid in the swamp and when he got here he stumbled over the squaw, maybe, and one dropped over there. Just look in that third little pen inside the big pen and see if they ain't there."

John returned in a few minutes to report that there were now five pairs of foxes in the pens, one with a set of four cubs, one black, two red and one cross. Twilight made no comment but continued on down the outside of the fence, studying the snow carefully as he went.

"Just run back to the house, lad, and put the fear of the Almighty in that Frenchman," he said after a few minutes. "Tell him we're both going away and he's not to let Baynes or Stritt make a move. And unload those foxes and bring Mike and the toboggan along. I may have to make another trip out of here and I always like to have my blanket and a little grub."

JOHN obeyed but when he returned twenty minutes later the trapper was not in sight. He called, received no answer from down near the lake, and hurried on to find Twilight walking close to the fence, stopping occasionally to examine the wire. John followed.

He and the dog had a difficult time in the deep snow. The crust would hold his weight until he straightened for the next step, when it would drop him suddenly to

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the ground. Mike, spreading his toes and skirting John's tracks, finally found that he could keep to the top of the crust, but he clearly displayed his disapproval of such a trail.

Finally Twilight came to a high, long rock that stretched from the fence to the edge of the ice on the lake. Winter winds had swept much of the snow from it, the Spring sun had finished the rest, and there was a clear stretch of bare going to the lake. After a final look at the fence Twilight scrambled to the top of the rock.

Several times he stooped to study its surface and when he finally came to the end, where a great, thick sheet of blue ice, left high by the receding waters, stretched out to the snow-covered ice beyond, he went slowly, weaving to the right and to the left, bending occasionally to study the snow.

John, the dog at his heels, could see nothing which warranted such close attention until he came across the tracks of Geggie's new rubbers coming around from the north end of the island beside the dog-team trail, and pointing southward toward the portage to the squaw's cabin.

Trying to make as much as possible of what he saw, John went more slowly than Twilight. When he looked up he saw the trapper standing on a huge, flat, bare rock which was slightly above the surface of the snow on the ice. It was fifty feet wide and twice as long and lay about fifty yards from the south tip of the island. It was from this rock that Geggie had turned back to borrow a plug of tobacco from Paquette, and the Winter trail had led straight down the length of it. Only now, after the few days of Spring sun, the snow had entirely disappeared and the tracks of the dogs and toboggan made the previous noon led around to the west and south.

When John reached the rock Twilight had gone on, still examining the snow closely. His pace began to quicken and at last, after he had gone a hundred yards, he looked back.

John had just discovered that the squaw, on her way to her death at the pens, had left the rock on the north side and walked through the wet snow toward the island. He glanced up to see Twilight waving to him and immediately started to follow.

At the south end of the rock he saw where the squaw had stepped on to it and beyond were her footprints deep in the slush. She had walked north on the east side of the snow-shoe trail while Geggie had gone south on the other side. On the trail itself were Stritt's footprints made on his return, the hard-packed snow having frozen sufficiently to hold him.

When John had read these things in the snow he looked up to see that Twilight, his head still down, was walking rapidly southward on the snow-shoe trail and that he was two hundred yards in the lead. John struck out immediately, but he had gone two miles before he finally overtook the trapper. In silence they continued swiftly for the remaining two miles to the south end of the lake.

Twilight evidently did not care to talk. Though John had not seen a change in the tracks, the trapper never ceased to watch them closely. Once or twice he made sweeping arcs to the right or left, leaving the trail one to two hundred yards on the side. But always he returned to look more carefully than before.

Once he came in on a long slant and John saw that he had been following the tracks made by Stritt on his way south the night before. But again Twilight made a sweep and at last, when only half a mile from the shore and less than a hundred yards to the east of the snow-shoe trail, he stopped suddenly and called.

John ran across to where the trapper stood looking down at the snow. Circling in from the east and from far to the side of the trail, came the tracks of a man made when the snow and slush were just beginning to freeze the night before. The sun, now half an hour high and shining through a break in the clouds, was reflected from the jagged pieces of thin crust turned on edge when broken, and the trail appeared to be a long string of diamonds, dwindling finally to the faintest of gleams far to the north on the great stretch of the open lake.

"I knew he'd get here some time," commented Twilight. "After he left the shanty he circled and struck the lake on the east side of the island. I followed him far enough to see where he went."

"Baynes?" said John, half in interrogation.

Twilight nodded and continued:

"Stritt came out east of the flat rock at the south end of the island, too, but not so far as Baynes did. He struck the trail

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farther back. Geggie is the only one who came around from the house on the toboggan trail."

John was about to speak but refrained when he realized fully what the trapper's last statement meant. Only Stritt and Baynes had been at the scene of the murder. One or the other was guilty, or both, and no one else.

"You go on and follow these tracks and see what he did," Twilight commanded as he started back. "I'll follow the other two. Come over to the squaw's shack when you find out what he did before he started for your place. Follow me, Mike."

John hesitated. Despite Myra's desire for the truth, despite his final resolution to see the thing through, he recoiled at being the instrument by which Baynes's guilt was finally fixed.

"But Jack," he objected. "This is the important trail to follow. I might overlook something you would see, the little thing you've been searching for."

Twilight kept on toward the shore. Ever since he had sent John back for the dog and the toboggan he seemed to have been absorbed in a new problem. His eyes had been lighted as are those of a hunter when he knows the game is in the next bit of cover. Then he seemed to realize suddenly what his friend had said.

"I've found 'that one little thing,' back there on the island," he called over his shoulder. "I'm on the big trail now, lad. I just want you to make sure of all Baynes did."

CHAPTER XVII

THE MURDERER

JOHN REID did his work thoroughly and conscientiously, but he had to overcome more than one difficulty. First, he did not wish to be the one who tracked down Myra's father. At times it seemed that he could not go on.

Myra had asked him, had insisted that he learn the truth and bring her a report of it as soon as he could. But later, when the present perturbation was gone, when she began to review all the aspects of the case, he feared that she would change. Always there would be between them the thought that he had been instrumental in fastening two murders upon her father.

But John had something else to contend with, something else that took his mind from the monotonous footprints he was following toward the shore of the lake. What had Twlight meant by his statement that he had found "that one little thing" back there on the island? Why this sudden and strange elation on the part of the trapper? What did he mean by saying that, in following the tracks of Geggie and Stritt he was on the big trail?

Because he wished to believe it, John felt certain each alternate moment that his friend had meant that Baynes was not guilty and that he had obtained the clue which would fasten the murders on Stritt or Geggie, or both. But always the picture of Baynes bending over the foxes in his own cabin, his actions upon being discovered, his wild accusations, the assurance of Twilight that his trap had caught the game, came to blot out his hopes.

The suspense drove him on faster and he tried to concentrate his mind on the moment's work. The sooner he finished, the sooner he could see Twilight, the more quickly the uncertainty would be ended. He reached the shore and followed the tracks into the brush.

Not even John's comparatively meager woodcraft was necessary to read the story outlined by Baynes's footprints in the snow after he had left the lake. He had been careful to avoid the trail but paralleled it closely once he was in the cover of the forest.

He did not go far. John saw by a beaten place in the snow that he had stopped for a time. Then he had turned at right angles to his course and crossed the portage trail, proceeding straight on west and slightly toward the shore. Near the lake John found another resting-place behind a thick clump of spruce. He could see where Baynes had stepped out to each side, as if peering through, and the lake was visible from that position.

Then the trail led on, straight down to the shore and out onto the ice toward the west. There were no more stops, although the steps were close together, indicating a leisurely pace. John followed them on until at last they struck a new trail, one instantly recognizable as that made by Twilight when he had hauled the foxes away from the squaw's cabin in the night. John continued a little farther and then, confident that he had traced Baynes's every

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movement until he had started for his own cabin, he turned back.

The story of Baynes's activities was plain. He had crossed the lake from the scene of the squaw's murder to the south end, keeping far to the east of the snow-shoe trail. He had started through the brush to her cabin, still trying to keep out of sight and in a place where his tracks would not be found readily. Then he had heard something, probably Twilight returning for his second load of foxes, perhaps a bark or growl from Mike, and had turned west, crossing the trail, and had spied upon the trapper until he had started on his last trip. After an interval he had followed.

John was elated that he had not found anything that he and Twilight did not already know. He had not discovered any new and damaging evidence against Myra's father. He walked swiftly back on the ice toward the portage trail, eager to find Twilight and learn what his friend had unearthed.

In his preoccupation he forgot that there might be other tracks of importance, that he should still use his eyes, and he passed heedlessly the clear-cut impressions of rubbers on the surface of the frozen snow. A few yards farther his subconscious mind compelled attention to what he had overlooked and he swung back instantly to examine the tracks.

The first fact that struck him was that they had been made very late in the night or after daybreak. Unlike all the other tracks he and Twilight had been following, they were shallow, made only on top of the crust and sharply defined in the frost that covered the surface of the lake. In this respect they were no different than the tracks he himself had made.

Baynes, Stritt and Geggie had all been at the south end of the lake either before the snow and slush had started to freeze or so soon afterward that they easily broke through what little crust had been formed. This man had been there hours later.

Further, his tracks came from the shore and, once out on the lake, turned directly west toward Reid's cabin. Nowhere on the lake had he or Twilight seen tracks leading in that direction except those of Baynes.

But the most startling thing about them was the fact that whoever had made them had been wearing a pair of worn rubbers. Geggie had new rubbers, the clear-cut corrugations of which showed almost no wear. Stritt had worn hobnailed shoes, footwear conspicuous because altogether unsuitable for the season. Baynes had worn old rubbers, a pair from which the corrugations had almost disappeared. They were very much like these.

John saw instantly, however, that these tracks were smaller than those he had been following. To make certain he placed a foot beside one and found that it was exactly the length of his own rubber. Then he ran over and compared his own footprint with one of Baynes's. The latter was at least two sizes larger.

John returned to the strange tracks and followed them. They led straight out until they, like Baynes's, had struck the toboggan trail Twilight had made in the night.

At a loss to account for the presence of a stranger on the lake so early in the morning, John turned and back-tracked the footprints. They led him toward the place where Twilight had come out on the lake with the foxes and soon joined the trapper's newly made trail. They kept to this in the thick brush until at last John came out in a little open space behind the squaw's cabin and in which the stolen animals had been hidden.

There was abundant evidence of this fact, the oblong impressions where the crates had rested on the snow, the hard-packed surface before them, and a well-beaten path leading eastward. John followed this with the expectation that it would take him to the squaw's cabin, and after a couple of hundred yards he came out at the rear of the building.

As he hurried around to the front the importance of his discovery dwindled. In the face of what he knew Twilight had to tell, everything else became of slight significance. In another minute or two he would have the solution of the mystery.

HE TURNED the corner to see Twilight standing in the door, a small ax in his hands. Instantly the strange footprints were forgotten. Something in the trapper's expression, something in his attitude, told that his pursuit of the clues was at an end.

But John found himself unable even to ask the necessary question. Now that the

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truth was at hand he was afraid of it. He could think only of Myra waiting in his cabin, of how she, too, would feel when she saw him coming with the news.

Twilight was so absorbed in his own thoughts he did not read what was so plainly written in the face of his friend.

"I'm going to start at the beginning!" he exclaimed eagerly as he backed into the cabin. "Come in here where it's warm and I'll tell you."

John threw himself on a bunk in a dark corner of the room. Twilight was too excited to sit down and, the little ax still in his hands, paced back and forth from the door to the stove.

"He was a smart one," he began, and John suppressed the objection he was about to make to his friend's method of breaking the news. Perhaps it would be better to take it gradually.

"Geggie must have started this thing soon after he went to work on the island," the trapper continued.

"Geggie!" cried John.

"Of course. No one else was smart enough to do what he did."

John sprang from the bunk to the middle of the room and stopped Twilight in the middle of a stride, nearly upsetting him as he did so.

"And Baynes never did it, never killed Ball?" he demanded.

"He doesn't even know as much about it as we do."

"And Stritt! He was in with Geggie?"

"Only as Geggie used him, like he used every one else, even you."

John did not speak again. He felt as a man feels who sets down a heavy pack after a long portage. His feet seemed hardly to touch the ground. There was a lightness in every movement, while his heart seemed to force itself into his throat and prevent any attempt at speech.

"Here's the way it all happened," Twilight continued as he resumed his pacing up and down the room.

"Never mind now!" interrupted John excitedly as he started toward the door. "That can wait. I've got to tell Myra first."

"No you don't," commanded the trapper roughly as he grasped John by the shoulder. "There's some things to finish up on this first, some things you've got to see so you can swear to them. And I've got to get one thing more, too. I'm going to tell you what I know first so you can understand it all. There'll be time enough to tell her."

"But she's waiting over there, breaking her heart. It's cruel to keep her in suspense."

"And it would be more cruel to let all this evidence against Geggie get away and leave her father blamed for it all. Come on with me and I'll tell you while I point out the things I want you to see."

Twilight led the way outside and began to talk immediately.

"Geggie planned this from the first," he said. "He thought everything out a long time in advance, everything but the killing, and he was mighty careful how he did that. Only 'one little thing,' or he would have got away with it all.

"First, he wanted some of those high-priced foxes. He was too smooth to steal them outright. That was risky. So he got this squaw up from Michipicoton. I haven't heard an Indian talk like she did since I was down in that country. And Baynes heard some one talking about Michipicoton just a little while ago. Geggie, don't you see?

"He put her in this old shack where he would pass on his way to town every week and somehow they got hold of a couple of black foxes. Then one night he steals the ten-thousand-dollar pair and puts the poor ones in their place. The squaw hides out the good ones and takes care of them.

"He must have been the one that fed Baynes up on this Indian business and got him suspicious of them so that if anything did go wrong he would have some one to blame. You know how he talked to you yesterday, pretending not to say much but dropping little things. I'll bet he was back of that row between Ball and Baynes, though he never intended to kill Ball. But he did bring in absinth for Stritt to feed to the old man, and I'll bet that was his idea in the first place, too.

"Anyhow, he picked out break-up time for stealing Black Hector and his mate, when traveling was well-nigh impossible. Only he went a little wrong there by thinking it was coming so early. He knew he couldn't leave another pair for them because it would be found out, so he got the idea of drilling through that white-pine stub and dropping it across the fence as if the wind had done it and let the foxes run

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away. Most any night in the Spring there is a good crust and a fox would never leave a mark on it.

"He would have got clear with that if it hadn't been for Ball making up his mind he was going to see those pens. Ball followed Baynes down there and when Geggie came up and got the plug of tobacco from Paquette and then hung around hiding, Ball saw him. He saw Geggie didn't get away far and that he came back with the squaw. When the two of them got the foxes into the crates Ball stepped out and Geggie hit him with one of those snow-shoes that was hanging on the shanty. Then he got excited and forgot to push over the white-pine stub and the wind did it yesterday and it got you."

Twilight, who had led the way out to the little lake south of the squaw's cabin, stopped and chuckled.

"I'd like to know what Geggie thinks of that," he said. "He's wondering yet who had it in for you so bad, and he'd never suspect the tree because he don't know it's down."

"But why was Baynes hiding those foxes in the swamp?" asked John. "And how can you prove all this?"

"I can't prove it all. I'm telling things as I figure they must have happened. As a matter of fact, I can't prove Geggie killed Ball. The squaw was the only witness to that, and she's dead, which is probably the reason Geggie killed her. That's one place I didn't find 'that one little thing.'"

"Did you happen to notice either of Geggie's hands?" demanded John eagerly.

"No. Why?"

"Well, when I picked up that snow-shoe he killed Ball with I cut my hand on the wire wound around the broken tail. Geggie couldn't have struck a blow like that without doing the same thing, only worse. We'll have to find Geggie and see."

"That's going to be a hard thing," Twilight began, but John again interrupted excitedly:

"And I can see why Baynes hid those foxes. He bought the ten-thousand-dollar pair against the advice of the other stockholders. He thought they were a bargain. When they were stolen and the others put in their place he got suspicious, and then when the cubs were born day before yesterday and he saw there were red and cross foxes in the lot, he hid the whole outfit so Stritt and Ball couldn't see them if they did happen to get to the pens. That explains why he's been acting so strangely."

"I guess he's just a bull-headed fool, all right," commented Twilight.

"But," John interrupted again, "you're just guessing about Geggie. I didn't tell you, with all the excitement this morning, that Myra and I found a black-fox skin in Stritt's baggage last night. How did he get hold of that?"

"I don't know, but I'm willing to guess that Geggie had something to do with it. That fellow didn't overlook anything, except the killings, and I can see how he had to kill the squaw. If anything did happen, and that skin was found in Stritt's packsack, you can see how it would help Geggie. Besides, it ain't a skin from a fox-farm fox anyhow, because they're all there and two more besides."

"But how could Geggie kill the squaw," objected John, "when he never went near the pens last night and Stritt and Baynes were there?"

"Because the squaw wasn't killed at the pens."

"Not killed there!"

"No," declared Twilight emphatically. "She was killed out on that flat rock in the lake. And Geggie was the only one who crossed it. The other two kept to the east.

"Stritt was going for the absinth you found on him, and which was part of Geggie's scheme to make it look like Stritt and the squaw were in together, and Baynes found the squaw's body when he was taking those foxes back and got the hunch she was stealing foxes. He was on his way to her shack to find out. Only I don't know how Geggie happened to be going out at that time."

"I guess I'm responsible for their all going," confessed John in frank self-reproach. "I was supposed to be on guard, and I—well, I went to sleep."

"Anyhow, Geggie left, and he met the squaw on the rock, which was just luck for him, in a way," said Twilight. "She was probably scared, or jealous. She might have been both after all I told her, and Geggie thought she was going to tell everything and killed her. You know how jealous a squaw gets of a white woman. I think he used this ax.

"How I found that out was by her tracks. After they left the rock and going to the

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island they were deeper and not the same shape. I followed them back to the pens and there I saw 'that one little thing' you're always joking me about. The outside wire fence around the pens sagged in places. I'd never noticed it before and I followed the fence around. While I was doing that I saw how sometimes it sagged in two tiers of wires, and after I'd noticed that three or four times I saw how Geggie got back to kill Ball after he'd borrowed that plug of tobacco. He just walked on the fence."

John saw at once how easily a man could make his way entirely around the big, outer fence and never leave a track in the snow. The barrier was ten feet high and very heavy. The wires were little more than an inch apart and every ten or twelve inches were stayed by vertical wires looped about each strand. By holding with his hands to the top wires and thrusting his toes between two strands above the snow, a man would have no difficulty in making his way along the fence. Still, there was one thing that bothered John.

"He couldn't carry the squaw's body that way," he objected.

"No, and he didn't. He killed her on the rock and then took off his rubbers and left them there. He put on the squaw's moccasins and carried her to the shanty and laid her down. Then he put the moccasins on her and walked back on the fence in his stocking feet until he got to the bare rock that runs from the fence to the water. And it was Geggie's stocking feet that gave him away on everything else. It was the 'one little thing' I was looking for.

"You see, one of the wires in the fence where he crawled was spliced and he caught a sock in that splice and left some yarn there. That's what I saw the first thing this morning and it gave me my first idea about Geggie. I hadn't thought much about him before that but right there I saw his whole game from beginning to end."

"But what about the wires sagging in two tiers?" asked John. "I don't understand about that."

"I mean two wires, one above the other, which means he made the trip on the wires twice. I suppose he got the idea of using the fence when he found Paquette was there the first night and he didn't dare leave two sets of tracks. He was a smooth one, all right, and if it hadn't been for his leaving some yarn on the fence, and again on a rough place on that rock, I'd never have suspected him. He just didn't overlook anything, almost."

"And then, when he got back to the flat rock on the lake, he put on his rubbers and came right along down here as if he hadn't stopped!" exclaimed John. "But where is he now?"

Twilight pointed to the trail they were following and John saw the imprints of Geggie's new rubbers, made when the snow had begun to freeze.

"And he's gone out to the railroad!"

"He tried to make it look that way, and he never stopped from the island to here. And another thing. There ain't no sign down here of the dogs yesterday, though Geggie said he found no ice in the river ten miles south of this place. But see that," and Twilight pointed to a dark hole in the ice just ahead of them.

"He isn't drowned?" cried John.

"No, he just tried to make out he was. I broke in there last night after I left the squaw. You know how the ice gets rotten in these muskeg ponds. I rolled clear, only getting my feet in, and then Geggie came along in the night and——"

"Fell in!"

"Maybe, but I don't think so. Here's Geggie's fix. He'd planned this thing for months, maybe a year, and everything had worked out all right until Ball showed up at the pens that night. The trouble with Geggie was he planned too much. He got Ball and Baynes to fighting and Ball sneaked down to the pens the very night Geggie was going to steal Black Hector and his mate.

"That wasn't part of his scheme and he had to kill Ball to keep from being found out. Then I caused trouble for him with what I told the squaw and he had to kill her or be squealed on. Things went bad for Geggie all along, and when he left the island last night he saw there was nothing for him to do but get those four foxes, skin them and clear out of the country. It meant he would be a marked man, but there was nothing else to do. Things were getting too hot for him.

"And then he saw this hole where I went in and it gave him a new idea. He'd covered all his tracks pretty well, and if it was thought that he had drowned he might not be suspected and chased. So that's what he did. See those finger-marks around the

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edge like he was clawing to get out? And there's his hat."

"But there aren't any tracks going away from the hole," objected John. "He must be drowned."

Twilight led the way back on the trail for a few yards and pointed to the snow. John bent down and saw a bit of yarn frozen to a jagged bit of crust.

"You see," said Twilight, "Geggie didn't take any chances in this thing. He knew he had to be careful, and he just waited until it was light enough to see that he didn't leave any tracks. Must have been cold standing out here and not moving a foot for so long."

"But those new rubbers of his would have made a mark even on the frozen crust."

"If he wore them. But he didn't. That yarn on the snow there shows he walked back to the cabin in his stocking feet, which wouldn't leave any sign to speak of. He didn't put on his rubbers until he got back to the cabin, and I know he didn't leave there until daylight this morning because there was a good fire still in the stove."

"And you've tracked him from there?"

"No, I'd just got the rest of it worked out when you come, the rest of it and this."

He held out the little ax he had been carrying and John looked at it in perplexity.

"What's that black stuff on it?" he asked.

Twilight struck a match and held it close to the ax head. The black substance on the surface crinkled and smoked.

"Whew!" exclaimed John. "Rubber."

"That Geggie certainly is the best I ever heard of," chuckled Twilight in frank admiration. "He went back to the squaw's cabin, thinking it would be believed he was drowned, and he built a fire and took his new rubbers——"

"Good God!" cried John, as he clutched the trapper's arm.

Then he turned and started back across the lake on the run.

"Come here!" Twilight called in exasperation. "I want you to see all these things so you can swear to them."

But John ran on without indicating that he had heard.

"Wait!" commanded Twilight. "Wait!"

John, fifty yards away, stopped and turned.

"Don't you see!" he shouted. "He's burned off the soles of his rubbers so they'd look like old ones, and then he found out you'd taken the foxes and he's gone over to my place. He's given the impression he's drowned and he doesn't want to be seen again by any living person, and she's there, all alone."

CHAPTER XVIII

MYRA FOLLOWS THE TRAIL

FOR a long time after John Reid had gone Myra Baynes sat beside the stove in his cabin, trying to adjust herself to what she firmly believed to be the truth. The loyalty of a daughter, the ties of blood, the love which had grown in her struggles for her father in the year she had spent at the fox-farm, all these cast themselves repeatedly against the cold fact that he was guilty of murder.

Until she and John had found him there in the cabin, until Twilight had stepped out of the kitchen with his accusation, she had never believed it possible that her father had been so weakened in mind and character by drink that he would turn against the last friend he had in the world they had known.

She thought she saw how she, too, had been deceived by him in the matter of the foxes hidden in the swamp beside the trail. With him, she had believed that the ten-thousand-dollar pair was a bargain. She had readily agreed when he had suggested that they be hidden after it had developed that the cubs, born the afternoon before Ball's murder, were not pure black foxes. It were better, she knew, that the fact be kept from the other stockholders until a better understanding and relationship had been established.

Myra saw now how this one act had led to everything else that had happened in the two nights and a day. She saw, too, how she had been led to believe that the foxes her father had hidden, and which she herself had helped to care for, were not the ten-thousand-dollar pair but two that had been substituted for them. This explained readily her father's plan, as the absinth he had been drinking explained in turn his change in character.

Quite naturally she found in Stritt the cause of all the trouble. It was Stritt who had brought in the absinth and who had

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given it to her father. Before Stritt had come Baynes had not had a drink for eight months. He had become his former self again, a big, strong, competent man, once more on the road to success.

With Stritt's advent, and that of the absinth, he had quickly lapsed to the condition which had brought ruin before.

Because Myra was intelligent enough to know that her father was the victim of a physical infirmity and not the wilful wrecker of his own life, her anger against the cause of his relapse increased until there was room for only pity for the parent. Her desire for the truth diminished. The maternal spirit which had been developed by her attitude toward her father in the last few years began again to dominate her thoughts. She felt only a desire to protect him, to shield him from the consequences of acts for which he was not responsible.

Daylight had come while Myra sat beside the stove. The lamplight had faded in the gray dawn. In that coldest hour of the twenty-four the fire had burned out. It was the cold, not the drab light, that aroused the girl from her seat. She walked to the east window and looked at the little clearing, at the trail that led to the big lake.

This first physical action seemed to bring mental decision. Her love for her father had assumed the ascendency, and now, cold, tired, oppressed by the rough interior of the cabin as the growing light disclosed the unhewed logs, she turned in an instant from accuser to defender, from doubter to champion. The next moment she had picked up her cap, mittens and long woolen scarf and was out of the door and running down the trail.

Myra had no plan, no idea of what she would do when she reached the island. She did not even remember John's offer to wipe out all traces of her father having been at the pens when the squaw was murdered. She had entirely forgotten Foster Stritt's declaration that he could furnish evidence which would clear him. Her only idea was to reach her home, to find her father and to be with him in his most desolate hour.

Putting on her mittens and cap as she ran, she went on down the winding trail. Half-way she discovered that the scarf had been dropped but she did not hesitate. The next moment she saw the white expanse of the lake ahead and hurried on as if expecting that a glimpse of the distant island would tell her what was happening there.

Despite the precipitate nature of her decision and of her action upon it, Myra was not in a panic. She was not so oblivious to her surroundings, not so intent on reaching the fox-farm, that anything connected with its mystery would escape her. Consequently, as the trees thinned and permitted glimpses of the lake, a fleeting opening gave her hardly more than the sensation that some one was out on the ice.

Immediately she stopped running and, watching carefully, went on until she again saw the dark spot far out from shore. For a long time she stood there. She did not move until the unknown traveler was less than half a mile distant. In that time she had thought of many things. First, Twilight and John and her father had gone to the island. None of them would have had time to go on from there to the south end of the lake and then cross back toward the southwest corner.

Secondly, this man was following the trail Twilight had made when he hauled the four foxes from the home of the dead Indian woman to John's cabin. She could see the long, slender line stretching straight toward the east. It was the trail by which her father had come to the trap Twilight had set.

Myra sprang forward eagerly as if to be closer and learn the identity of the stranger. For her last thought had brought a multitude of other thoughts. If Twilight had set such a trap was it not possible that her father had blundered into it, that the unknown now approaching was the real victim of the trapper's plans?

In the same instant she recognized the stranger. The red of his checked shirt, the long, gliding stride, the tall, heavy-chested figure, all told her it was Geggie.

With the rapidity of a machine-gun's fire thoughts flashed through Myra's mind. Perhaps it was her wish to believe her father innocent. Perhaps it was her woman's intuition. Perhaps a subconscious study of the fox-farm mystery had formulated certain facts, pierced certain shadows. In any event, Myra instantly grasped the truth. Geggie had murdered Ball. Geggie had killed the squaw. Geggie had stolen the foxes.

That she did not have the proof did not in the least cause her to doubt. Rather there

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came the thought that she must get the proof, that she and not John and his trapper friend must clear her father.

Naturally her first act was to get out of Geggie's way, out of his sight. She turned and looked back along the trail. Less than twenty feet from her was a branch leading off to the right into a thick clump of jackpines. With a final glance out at the lake, she hurried to the fork and turned into the dense growth.

Myra had gone only a few yards off the main trail when a bit of snow seemed to detach itself from her very feet and dart ahead of her. The next moment it had swung high into the air and then back almost into her face. Terror stricken, she watched the convulsive, swinging ball of white struggling in the air before her until she realized that she was on one of John Reid's rabbit trails and that she had frightened a rabbit into a spring-pole snare.

Bending her head, she ran under the kicking, twitching animal and on into the thicket until she believed she could no longer be seen from the trail but could watch Geggie as he passed.

SHE heard him at last on the crust near shore and then an opening gave her a glimpse of him as he stood there studying the tracks on the trail. His face, though bent downward, was toward her, and in the uneasy attitude, the quick movements of his head and body, in the rapidly shifting glances out on to the lake and along the trail into the woods, Myra had immediate confirmation of her belief.

In the same instant, too, she grasped the details of the situation. Geggie had gone to the squaw's cabin to get the foxes. He had seen where Twilight had taken them away and he was following the trapper's trail. His uneasiness showed that he did not wish to be discovered. His study of the tracks showed that he was trying to learn who was at John's cabin.

Myra knew that the tracks would tell so experienced a woodsman that the three men had gone to the cabin and had left it. Her own footprints, made when she had come with John, were there, and she could only hope that they had been obliterated by those of the three men on their way back to the island. Otherwise, she knew, Geggie would suspect her presence.

Her tracks made on her way from the cabin to the point where she had first seen the foreman were on top of all the others, but as she faced this problem Geggie solved it for her. Apparently satisfied with what he saw at the edge of the lake, he turned at once down the trail to the cabin, his eyes no longer on the path but ahead of him.

Breathless, Myra watched him as he approached. She realized that she was not completely hidden, that part of her white face could be seen through the brush. At any instant that searching, constantly shifting glance might pick it out from the green jackpine.

And then Geggie looked, turning quickly, in sudden fright. He stopped and Myra felt that he was staring stright into her eyes. The rabbit, dangling from the long spring-pole, twitching in the last death spasm, swung between their faces. The foreman grunted his relief and passed on.

But it was not the narrow escape from discovery that held Myra motionless after the sound of Geggie's feet on the hard trail had died away. The face that had been turned toward hers, the light in his eyes when he had stopped to look at the rabbit, had told too plainly what her fate would be if she followed him. The steady, silent, industrious woodsman she had known was gone. In his place was a hunted animal, an animal that itself preys and is ready to fight if need be.

Myra waited until Geggie had had time to reach the cabin. She was eager to run and yet afraid to move. The lake and possible safety were only a short distance away. The fear of the face that had just passed drove her on, and the knowledge that upon her alone depended the clearing of her father's name held her there. Perhaps no one except herself knew the identity of the criminal. She alone must obtain the proof.

Then Geggie's plans came to her in a flash. The man was clearly running away. He had stolen Black Hector and his mate and the second pair of foxes, fifty-thousand-dollars' worth in all. The most valuable pair was safe on the island, but the others, worth really much more than had been paid for them, were at the cabin.

Myra saw that the man was hunted, that he was fleeing. She did not know what John and Twilight had discovered, how close they were on his trail, but she

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did know that even if he had all day for the work, Geggie could not get away with the foxes alive. His plans most evidently had miscarried and the only thing for him to do was to kill the two animals and get away with their pelts.

She crept softly out to the main trail. Geggie was not in sight. The way was clear for her to reach the lake and the island undiscovered. But she turned at once toward the west and, planless, merely hoping, hurried on toward the cabin.

Her fear seemed to have left her. She thought only of her father, of the evidence she must obtain, of the further crime Geggie would commit. Eagerness succeeded helplessness and she walked on more quickly.

When the cabin came in sight down the trail she stepped off into the deep snow and watched. For ten minutes nothing happened, no one appeared. She made many plans, even to the capture of the foreman in the cabin, only to discard them. At last she decided that she had delayed too long, that she was too late to prevent the death of the foxes. She moved toward the trail, only to draw back quickly into the shelter of the brush. Beyond the cabin and coming toward it was Geggie.

She saw him approach, saw him turn at once into the door. It was her time, she thought, but before she could act she saw him come out with one of the fox crates in his arms. He lifted it to a shoulder and started off toward the west.

Myra saw instantly that Geggie either did not intend to kill the foxes for their pelts but was trying to get them away alive, or that he did not wish to kill and skin them in the cabin, where he might be caught. She believed that he intended to take them away, probably to a spot where he could work and keep an eye on his back trail for some distance, and then with the skins make his way to the railroad and out of the country.

She knew, too, that the journey would require some time and that he would need food. He had carried an empty packsack when he had come off of the lake but it did not hang from his shoulders when he went away with the foxcrate. If he had left this packsack in John's cabin he would return for it and some food and possibly a blanket. If he had taken it with him on his first trip away from the cabin he would not come back.

While the girl debated what she should do she saw Geggie returning. He was empty handed and he walked swiftly toward the cabin and entered it.

Myra knew it was her last chance to act. On his first trip away from the cabin he had taken one foxcrate. She had seen him take the second. He was now getting some food. In another moment he would be gone. Without a plan, without a thought of what she would do or say, she sprang out into the trail and ran into the clearing, straight toward the face which had so filled her with terror when she had first seen it less than half an hour before.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BATTLE

GEGGIE, his back to the door, was kneeling beside his packsack when Myra burst into the cabin. His bent body seemed to straighten instantly and shoot into the air, turning as it did so and facing Myra when he came down on his feet. He took one step backward, quickly, defensively. His eyes, too, showed his terror, and also his willingness to fight, but Myra seemed not to see any of these things.

"Oh, Tom!" she exclaimed as she stopped just inside the door. "I'm so glad you're here. Have you seen the foxes? Black Hector and his mate and the second pair? They've been stolen, all of them, and Twilight Jack and Mr. Reid have been hunting the whole country for them."

"Where?" broke in Geggie harshly.

"They said they were going to make a circle of the lake and started west and then turned north. I came down here. They don't know I'm away from the island, but I wanted to help. We can't let fifty-thousand-dollars' worth of stock get away without a struggle."

"What time did they start?" demanded Geggie when she paused.

"A little more than an hour ago. I left as soon as I thought they couldn't see me. The foxes were stolen last night and the night before, but Twilight and Mr. Reid didn't find a track leaving the island except yours and Mr. Stritt's. Father explained where you had gone and said he had sent you, and Foster told a straight story."

Myra's reference to Geggie's leaving had been a shot in the dark and she paused to

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see what effect it had. She knew that Geggie and her father had talked together for a long time before the foreman had gone and the remembrance of that conversation brought a sickening dread that possibly, after all, her father had been in league with the foreman.

"Didn't they find any other tracks?" asked Geggie sharply.

He seemed to have gained control of himself but his glance never left the girl's face except to dart quickly to the window or open door and back. Myra had been watching him closely but always trying to give the impression that she found his presence in the cabin perfectly natural and that she was intent only on finding the stolen foxes.

"They found the tracks of one Indian, a squaw," she answered. "She was killed there by the shanty, right where Mr. Ball's body lay, and Twilight thinks Indians stole the foxes and were clever enough to get away without leaving a trace. He says they probably had a quarrel and the woman was killed. He says he's sure to get trace of them somewhere on the lake or where they left it."

Geggie studied the girl closely when she finished speaking. Then his eyes became a little vacant as his mind worked over what she had said, on what it might mean to him. Suddenly he stepped past her toward the door and looked out. After a quick glance across the clearing he returned to the middle of the room and took a position from which he could watch the trail through the window.

Myra, feigning breathlessness from her hurried journey across the lake, sank into a chair beside the stove and faced the foreman. Back of her steady gaze was a turmoil of fear and of planning, of terror and of hope that she was succeeding. But, as women are better actors than men, she succeeded in hiding everything except what she wished to show, a consuming anxiety to get track of the foxes.

"You didn't see any tracks on the lake, did you, Tom?" she broke in upon his thoughts.

Instantly Myra knew she had blundered, that she had blundered from the start. Of course he had seen tracks on the lake. He had seen where Twilight had hauled the foxes from the squaw's cabin. He had seen where John and Twilight and her father had come to the cabin and had left it again.

She found immediate confirmation of her fears in the foreman's face. It bore the expression which must have been there when Ball was killed, when the squaw met her death. And back of it, prompting it, was the knowledge that she had been lying, that she knew what he was.

Myra drove every faculty to its task of dissimulation. It was her only hope, to force belief in what she had said.

And then Geggie, clearly perplexed, clearly undetermined, turned away. Myra saw that he wanted to believe and hope ousted despair. She studied his face closely, praying for complete acceptance of her story. She did not see that he was staring at the floor before him. She did not understand the quick return of the expression she had seen on his face at the rabbit runway. Instinctively she looked where he had been looking.

Lying beyond the stove, ten feet from where she sat and in a part of the room in which she had not been since she had entered, was the long red and white scarf she had worn about her neck all Winter.

Myra saw the significance of Geggie's discovery before he did. Because of this she was able, when the foreman turned suddenly to confront her, to mask her comprehension of what had occurred and also her knowledge that he knew.

"Isn't it terrible, Tom!" she exclaimed. "That those Indians should steal Black Hector and his mate and kill them just for their skins?"

Geggie did not reply. He only looked at Myra and the girl's first glimpse of his face told that she had failed completely. The hunted and desperate, yet pitiless, expression she had seen when he came off the lake was there, and in it she read not only the futility of trying to obtain evidence against him, but also an inevitable danger to herself.

Somehow she saw in that implacable stare the man's knowledge that only through taking her life could he win through to safety. The realization acted as a physical anesthesia. She sat there in the chair beside the stove absolutely incapable of movement, even unable to look away from the eyes that stared into hers.

But her mind seemed to be more active

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than ever. She remembered every detail of the room, even the distances. She knew that three steps behind her was the front wall of the cabin and that on it hung John's rifle. She knew that she must have that rifle to escape the certain death that stared at her less than three steps in the other direction, and she knew equally well that, even if she could move, the first action on her part would serve only to spring her own death-trap.

Myra did not expect help. She knew that there was no possibility of John completing his work and returning in time to aid her. Twilight had spoken of being at the pens at daylight to examine the snow around the body of the squaw. No one was within five miles of her.

And then came a mere suggestion of hope. The expression in Geggie's eyes began slowly to change. The savage lines of his face became less resolute. The decision which had been incontestable was weakening.

Suddenly he looked away. The spell was broken. Quite imperturbably Myra suggested that they begin a search of the southern part of the lake for signs of the thieving Indians. Geggie turned without answering and walked to the window that faced the east.

Though her knees were so weak they scarcely supported her, Myra stood up. She looked for an instant at Geggie's back and then turned toward the south wall. Three steps and the rifle was in her hands.

THE foreman whirled when he heard the movement behind him. He took one step forward and stopped. For a long time they stood facing each other. Though he looked straight into the muzzle, Geggie did not flinch.

Myra found herself suddenly and strangely under the influence of the single streak of pity in the man's make-up which had been responsible for her temporary safety, for her escape from the death that had passed so closely. She recognized the inconsistency of the emotion, yet she knew that if Geggie walked straight toward her, his hands outstretched for her throat, she could not pull the trigger. She could not bring herself to kill the man who had only the moment before refused to kill her.

Luckily for Myra, Geggie did not read her thoughts correctly. He saw only a woman with a rifle, and with all a man's fear of a weapon in untrained, nervous hands, he did not move.

Myra was the first to speak. She felt the strain far more than did the man. She knew that if they continued to stand thus she would become frantic and throw the rifle to the floor.

"You had better sit in that chair, Tom," she said in a low voice.

She was about to add, "Please don't do anything to make me shoot," but restrained herself. Still holding the rifle ready, she moved a chair so that she could sit and partly face him, the weapon resting across her knees but clasped in both hands and ready for instant use.

Had Geggie known it he could have risen and walked out through the door without the least resistance. Instead, he sat in the chair and stared at Myra, his anger and his fear rising rapidly until his face again bore the expression which had brought terror to her. But now it acted as a revivifier. It brought courage and with it a determination that, despite the relenting of her prisoner when he had held the upper hand, she would not hesitate to shoot if necessary.

An hour passed. Geggie scarcely moved in his chair. For a long time he had not looked at Myra, and in the concentration of his stare at the floor before him the girl found greater cause for anxiety than in the malevolence of his former glance. She knew it meant plotting, cunning, and she dreaded his slow scheming more than his quick desperation. Despite the weapon in her hands, she felt somehow that she was powerless before him.

This fear became hypnotic. The certainty that this big, savage, desperate man could overcome her with his bare hands obsessed her. Her former feeling of being the prey of a monster returned.

Then, too, Myra had had no sleep. The strain, emotional and physical, of the twenty-four hours since the discovery of Ball's body became unbearable. Despite her efforts, quick, nervous movements came, adding to her terror and betraying it to Geggie. She watched him apprehensively, and he seemed not to know she was there.

Another hour passed. Myra felt that she must scream, must throw the rifle from her and rush out of the door, unless help came.

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"That gun's not loaded!"

Geggie spoke harshly, sharply, positively, turning suddenly to face her as he did so.

The confidence shone in his eyes and it grew into a savage assurance as Myra's face betrayed her inability to refute him.

The foreman laughed outright and straightened in his chair.

"I thought so," he said. "You don't know. You don't even know how to find out."

Frantically Myra sought to rally her courage.

"There is one way I can find out," she said, aiming the weapon at her prisoner and resting a finger against the trigger.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Geggie stated as if she had not spoken. "You don't know if the gun's loaded. You don't want to take a chance and I don't. You stand back there against the wall and I'll get up and walk out. I'll not go near you and you won't pull the trigger. I'll have to take your word and you'll have to take mine. Each one stands to lose, but I'm willing to split the chances."

Myra did not reply for a moment. She realized that the man had waited until she was frantic with the strain, that he had coolly and calmly deducted the facts in the situation and had acted at the right time. His very coolness and certainty made her feel that she was on the defensive, that he was offering her a chance to which she was not entitled by the real situation.

"If you don't," Geggie broke in upon her thoughts, "I'll take the chance that the gun isn't loaded," and again that savage, ruthless expression flashed across his face.

Myra stood up and backed against the wall, the rifle at her shoulder. Geggie rose instantly and without again looking toward her he walked around the stove and out through the door. She heard his feet crunching the snow outside, heard him walk quickly away toward the west.

Myra lowered the rifle, looked at it, and then shot the lever down and back. A cartridge flashed across the room and rolled into a corner and she saw and heard another take its place in the barrel.

With the weapon still cocked, she ran to the door. Geggie was half-way across the clearing. She raised the rifle, took aim at his back and then collapsed inside the door.

CHAPTER XX

THE END OF THE TRAIL

JOHN REID was the first to reach the squaw's cabin, the first to rouse Mike from his nest in the snow and turn him toward Beaver House Lake. Mike was very intensely his master's dog but he was possessed of much intelligence and also a fondness for his master's friend. Then, too, the urgency of John's manner appealed to him, and in the dash across the portage and thence to the southwest corner of the lake he required no coercion.

There is something about the work-dog that is found in no other animal. His love for the job is unsurpassed and his pride in his task is preeminent. He may be a fool or he may be a cunning, crafty shirker but, once his pride is aroused, nothing can restrain his ardor. He will go until each foot is lifted by a mighty effort, when strength has vanished and an indomitable will alone remains.

Mike was true to the traditions of his kind and once he struck his long, easy, wolf-like lope he never abandoned it. The going was of the best or even so large a dog could not have maintained such a pace with so heavy a load. But on the firm crust, greased by the warming rays of the sun, the toboggan glided easily.

John rode every step of the way. The sharp snow particles were dashed into his face by the scratching claws ahead of him and the little sleigh swung to one side and then to the other. He noticed none of these things, however, so consuming was his dread of what he would find across the lake. Once the hope came to him that Geggie might have turned off, might have abandoned the trail. He stopped Mike and scrambled to his feet to look. But the prints of the vulcanized rubbers were still there and, sickened by his terror, John again threw himself upon the toboggan and urged Mike onward.

The knowledge that Geggie had kept on toward the cabin confirmed his worst fears. He knew that the man had sought to give the impression that he was drowned. Discovery even by a defenseless woman would mean a fresh murder. As Mike, galloping now with a great effort, turned off the ice on the trail, John's fear had become a certainty and a heedless rage possessed him.

He was wholly unprepared, therefore,

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to see Myra sitting on the floor of his cabin, just inside the door. One hand supported her swaying body while the other rubbed at her eyes.

"What did he do!" cried John as he rolled off the toboggan and ran to her. "Did he try to kill you? What is it? Are you badly hurt?"

"He's gone," she answered dully. "He's gone with the foxes, and he'll kill them. Hurry!"

"Never mind the foxes," he replied angrily. "They've caused enough trouble already. But Myra, didn't he hurt you?"

As she shook her head John saw the rifle lying on the floor beside her.

"You didn't shoot him!" he exclaimed.

"No," she replied as she indicated her desire to rise.

John helped her to a chair, looking about the room for signs of a struggle.

"But I don't understand," he protested. "Why did he go away without attempting to kill you? It was part of his game."

"I know," she said, clinging to his hands in sudden terror. "He did want to, but I got the gun and held him. And finally we compromised and he went away with the foxes, and I fainted, there in the door. You must hurry before he kills and skins them. He didn't carry them far."

"How long ago was this?"

"I don't know. I fainted and just came to. You saw me. But it can't be long."

John hesitated and then picked up the rifle. Until then he had felt only boundless relief and joy because the miracle had happened, because Myra was alive and uninjured. But again the thought of what might have been came to him. The girl's drawn face, still lined by the terror of her experience, brought back the rage which had possessed him in the last half of his ride, and he started toward the door.

"Myra! Look!" he called excitedly. "Here's Geggie! And he's a prisoner. It must be the police Jack sent for."

The girl ran to his side and they stood at the door together, watching three men coming toward them, single file, along the trail. In the center, his head bowed, was the foreman.

Their hands touched as they stood there. John's closed over Myra's and then he drew her back from the open door and swung her about so that she faced him.

"I guess I don't have to tell you what you were waiting to hear," he said.

"No," and she smiled for the first time since he had come, "I knew as soon as I saw Geggie."

"And you said—" he faltered as he held out his hands.

Myra took a quick step forward and they forgot even the men outside until the snow on the trail crunched beneath their feet.

"Come in!" called John as he sprang to the door. "You got him!"

"He's the man?" asked one of the strangers as he passed his handcuffed prisoner in ahead.

"He's the man!" repeated John decisively. "How did you happen to catch him?"

"Twilight's note said some one was stealing foxes at the fox-farm and we caught this fellow opening a crate across this little lake and getting ready to kill one, so we brought him along."

"But how did you happen to be coming that way?" asked John.

"The Indian Jack sent brought us by one of his trapping trails. Said it was better going. It was just luck, I guess."

While John guarded the prisoner the two policemen returned for the foxcrates and soon afterward, with the valuable animals locked in the cabin, all five set out for the island.

At the end of the trail they met Twilight, who had run the entire four miles after John. The trapper did not ask a question or make a comment. With a brief greeting for the policemen he turned and went with the others across the lake.

Tom Geggie was a cool, calculating, clever thief, but he was not a deliberate murderer. He believed in playing a safe, careful game, and every move was planned well in advance. Violence had no part in his program, not only because it was unsafe, but because the man was not capable of coldly contemplating the taking of life.

Accordingly, when every one gathered in the living-room of the Baynes cabin that afternoon and Twilight Jack, for the benefit of the policeman, began to tell the story of events on the island as he had read them in the signs he had found, the foreman was not the calm, unruffled person the others had always known.

Twilight began at the beginning and did not leave out a detail. He told the circumstances which led to the suspicion of

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every one except the real criminal. He told of the quarrel between Ball and Baynes, of conditions as they existed on the island the night of the first murder, and of Stritt more than any one else he was most unsparing.

The young man from the States, usually so cool and self-possessed, began to writhe before the scorching contempt of the woodsman's words, while the real criminal was forgotten by the others in their repugnance toward Stritt.

"He's nothing but a brush wolf," Twilight concluded. "He just prowled around the edges, never having nerve enough to come out in the open for what he wanted, but always working little tricks. And he didn't have sense enough not to be Geggie's tool when he wanted him."

Twilight then plunged into the real story of the murder of Ball, the theft of the foxes and the death of the squaw. Geggie sat as if hypnotized. The thoroughness of the trapper's investigation, his ability to see everything, his uncanny power to deduct each action, almost each thought, from the signs, the vividness of the story as he told it, all had a powerful effect on the prisoner.

At first Geggie merely admitted to himself that he had met a better woodsman. When Twilight began to tell how each action had been planned, however, the foreman felt his grip slipping. This was no mortal analyst. He scarcely dared think for fear his thoughts would be read.

When Twilight's story was finished the prisoner's nerve was gone. A murderer of necessity, not of choice, awed by the recital of his crimes and in very terror of the deaths he had caused, he was completely broken.

Then Twilight began to sum up his evidence. Suddenly he demanded that the prisoner show the palm of his right hand.

"There'll be a scratch there from the wire on the tail of the snow-shoe he killed Ball with," he told the policemen confidently.

"You devil!" Geggie fairly screamed.

He wheeled toward the policemen, half in supplication, half in relief.

"Write it out!" he exclaimed. "Write it out and I'll sign it. Anything, just to get away from here!"

His voice broke at the end and then he looked up as if in a final effort to free himself from the burden that crushed his soul.

"I never intended to!" he cried. "I planned to steal the foxes, and I exchanged one pair a month ago. We were going to take Black Hector and his mate. But Ball was there, hiding, and he saw me, and I had to do it. Then last night Minnie came to tell what she knew. I met her out there on the flat rock. She wouldn't listen to reason, and I had to kill her.

"But I didn't want to. I didn't want to kill either of them, and this morning, over there across the lake, when I could have gone free, I couldn't bring myself to kill the girl."

THE next morning, before the policemen started for the railroad with their prisoner, John called Stritt to one side.

"I know you're broke," he whispered, "and I know you don't find this a comfortable place. Here's a hundred, all I have with me. It will see you out."

Despite his contempt for the man, John was touched by the expression of gratitude that came to his face.

"I guess I never was anything but a yellow dog," was the broken comment.

There had been something of repentance in his manner and again John felt pity for the man, only to have his old contempt return when he saw the real cause of his humiliation.

"I was in the sucker rôle," Stritt continued. "Geggie fooled me, like he fooled every one else, and I thought he was a rube. He is the one who got me to buy that black fox-skin of an Indian. He knew if anything happened it would be found and I would be caught. I guess I deserved to lose. I was outplayed.

"Keep the fox-skin, Reid. I paid a hundred for it, so we are square there."

John turned away in disgust. He did not have his old desire, as expressed to Geggie at the woodpile, "to get in three good wallops."

Myra, her father, John and Twilight stood on the veranda of the Baynes cabin for a time, watching the policemen, their prisoner and Stritt crossing the bay. When the little procession had rounded the southern tip of the crescent they entered the living-room.

Spencer Baynes had scarcely spoken from the time John Reid and his party had arrived from across the lake the day before.

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The harsh, irritable manner had disappeared and in its place was a deep mortification which, in a man of so imposing appearance, softened even John's attitude toward him. Twilight, too, in his story of the solution of the fox-farm mystery, had been inclined to be lenient.

But it was not the man's nature to continue in such meekness. A strong character may be humbled by the ordeal of fire but it quickly regains its strength, a strength beautiful rather than rugged, considerate where it had been harsh.

As the others entered the living-room Baynes went to his desk. When he faced them there was a check-book in his hands.

"I want you gentlemen to understand," he began, "that I consider myself eternally in your debt and that I can never hope even to express my appreciation in words. To you, however," and he faced Twilight "because your work is to a certain extent professional, I feel that I can make a slight payment in money. The company's treasury is not entirely exhausted. What is your usual charge for similar services?"

"Why," stammered Twilight, "I never charge for such things. When I do any work I work by the day, like guiding and such things, and I've always charged two-fifty."

"And two days would cover this?" asked Baynes with a smile.

"It wasn't that much, quite, but I worked most of the night, I suppose."

Baynes was busy with his pen for a moment and then he tore out a check and passed it to the trapper.

"Remember," he said, "that I still feel eternally indebted to you."

Twilight inspected the check and then looked up in bewildered protest.

"You said 'two-fifty,' " insisted Baynes. "And two days makes five hundred. It's mighty cheap, Twilight, cheap with another cipher added, and I only wish I could. I can never even tell you what I owe you and Mr. Reid. I can not even apologize to him."

He turned and faced John.

"I might," he continued, "as a slight indication of my attitude toward you, say that four hundred and fifty shares of this fox-farm are on the market at par and that I would rather have you become their owner than any one I know."

John could not hide his confusion and Baynes hastened to add:

"I would not suggest this were I not certain that it will be a marvelously profitable investment."

"I appreciate that," answered John, "but, since you have introduced a business subject, I must discuss it from a business standpoint.

"As a business man yourself, and after knowing what has happened here, you must realize that I could not consider such a thing if the control is to remain in your hands. Further, I have only twenty-five thousand dollars to invest."

"I understand you perfectly," Baynes replied. "I would have been disappointed had you said anything else. Only this plan occurred to me after a conversation last night with Myra in which she told me a very happy bit of news.

"It is this way. Your twenty-five thousand dollars will buy Ball's interest. Last night I made arrangements with Stritt to take over, and now hold, his stock. I intend to add sixty shares of my own to this two hundred and give them to Myra. That will leave me four hundred and ninety out of a thousand shares."

Baynes stopped and looked at Myra. There was a twinkle in his eyes much like that so characteristic of the sweeter nature of Twilight, and John caught his first glimpse of the man who had been, and now seemed to have returned.

"So you see, John, it is up to you to handle the controlling interest," Baynes continued. "Twilight, come down to the pens with me. Black Hector has a cut on one of his hind legs, and I want you to tell me what to do about it."

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THE YELLOW STREAK

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "Rotorua Rex," "From the Seas," etc.

LARRY DOYLE stood looking at the rest of the Lighthouse Planters, his long arms reaching almost to his knees, his red-topped head up so that the obstinate chin was thrust forward, trouble in his gray eyes.

"I don't see the sense of it," he said. "I'm a green man on the job, and I'm willing to do all that rightly comes my way——"

"Well," said Sullivan, black-haired and dark as Doyle was blond, "this goes wit' the job, my bucko. Cassidy's men are sore because the boss got the contract, and they are out wit' their brags to do us up. We are goin' to beat them to it, tonight."

"What's brags?" asked Larry. "Let them start anything wit' me and I'm there, but 'tis no sinse in fightin' that I see on the eve of startin' to work. The boss 'd rather have sound men on the job than a bunch of cripples, I'm thinkin'."

"Afraid of gettin' that fly-specked, snub-nosed dial of yours injured?" inquired Sullivan, sarcastically. "More likely to get it improved than damaged. And you Irish! Yah, you've got a yellow streak in y' as wide and as long as the big, hulking body of ye."

Larry flushed until his freckles were blended with the dull red of the rising blood.

"I'm afraid of no man," he said. "I'm as good a man as ye are any day in the week, Tim Sullivan. This is the first decent job I've had in six months," he went on, doggedly, worriedly conscious of the sneering faces that surrounded him. "I'm goin' to make good in it because I've got to, and I'm not goin' to spoil my chances of not showin' up when the steamer leaves because I was fool enough to go lookin' for a fight wit' a crowd I never saw before. Let some one start something and I'm there."

"Then start something."

Sullivan, tempestuous with the drinks he had been absorbing on the eve of the lighthouse foundation-planting, according to custom, slapped Doyle fairly across the cheek.

The big, clumsy fellow went into action like a bull, lowering his head and roaring as he rushed at Sullivan, experienced in a hundred fights before Larry had ever left King's County for the "States." Sullivan stepped back and aside on nimble feet and hit the charging Doyle back of the ear. The blow might have felled an ox. Had it reached the mark the fight would have been over, but Larry shook his head, forced back the film that started to daze his eyes as he stumbled sideways, gripped at the edge of a table, warded off the next blow that came crashing in and clinched with his opponent.

Sullivan tore at the encircling arms that snaked about his ribs, but they sank into his flesh and constricted his lungs so that he gasped for breath. Every second diminished the effect of the blow as Larry hung on and presently the muscles, trained in

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the smithy in the "old country," began to swell and ripple, the knuckles of Larry's fists tightened to their clasp and Sullivan's broad back began, ever so slowly, to bend backwards. He was flailing desperate blows on Larry's kidneys, but he might as well have been beating on a drum for all the effect they produced.

Doyle set himself for the heave. Both the men would have scaled within a few ounces of one hundred and ninety pounds of solid flesh, bone and muscle, but, presently, Sullivan, his face purpling under the constriction of those boa-like arms, found himself standing on tip-toe. Larry's chin was set deep in his shoulder, Larry's gray eyes were the color of a knife-blade. He knew little of long-range fighting, little of boxing, and he was doing the best he knew, the best he could.

Up went Sullivan's heels clean from the floor, up until the tensioned crowd waited for the crash that would send Sullivan hurtling to the ground! A voice, deep, authoritative as the crack of a whip, rang out.

"Break, the two of ye, break, or I'll knock your brains to mush."

It was Flaherty, the boss, a giant of a man, gray-haired but in the full tide of an abnormal strength and with the will that had forced a thousand men to do his bidding in the face of death and disaster, his voice carrying its dominant message even to the two fury-flushed brains.

Larry released his man and stepped back, shame-faced. Sullivan, panting for breath to voice his protest, faced Flaherty.

"Not a word out of ye, Tim," thundered the boss. " 'Tis ye who started it, I'll warrant. Let the lad alone, though he was trimmin' ye at that. An' listen, all of ye, be leavin' Cassidy's gang alone. It's men I want on this job. The contract's bindin' an' the time nigh up. We've four days to set the caisson, an' a mud bottom. The weather's shifty as a whale's fluke. I'm not riskin' my money on a bunch of cripples. Ye'll go on board tonight, an' sober, every mother's son of ye, or get your time, an' I'll ship another crew. Hogan, ye'll be sellin' my men no more liquor tonight if ye value my friendship. Get your dunnage together, and down to the steamer. Tide sets at four. 'Tis the last word I'm givin' ye. Mind it!"

He turned on his heel and walked out of the room, leaving the men half sheepish, half agrin. Sullivan turned to Doyle.

"We'll let this ride till the job's over, an' then we'll settle it. As good a man as I am, are ye? Wait an' see."

DAWN saw the steamer, laden with the frame of the great wooden caisson, twenty feet deep, a bottomless box to which was bolted four mammoth cylinders of iron, and the foundation cast-iron base on which the new lighthouse was to stand, making slowly out to the shoal across a sea that was comparatively calm but dingy-gray of color. The waves slapped nastily against her hull and those of the tugs and cement scows with tentative blows, as a boxer will tap a punching-bag before he speeds up. The sky matched the sea. Here and there as the sun mounted, patches of blue showed with scud drifting fast across them.

Flaherty surveyed sea and sky with an anxious, weather-wise glance.

" 'Tis a toss-up," he said to the captain of his steamer. "How's the glass?"

"She's a bit low, but she's steady. 'Tis a toss-up, as ye say, Mr. Flaherty. Will ye keep on if it thickens?"

"No," said Flaherty moodily. "There's no use riskin' too much."

The captain nodded and smiled as Flaherty walked away. The idea of Flaherty weighing a risk was somewhat of a joke.

It was Flaherty who, when the gale overblew the great drum, half-filled with cement, and a barge cut loose and rammed another, ordered the men to get to the barge he could not afford to lose, by way of a hawser and, when they hung back, swung into the barge with his twelve-year-old boy in his arms and stood there waist-deep, shaming them.

It was Flaherty who, when the seas threatened to get the best of the pumps and it was a question of inches in the height of the waves between safety and drowning, cracked the head of one man who tried to bolt, with the gas-pipe by which the boss backed his authority, and herded the rest to saving the situation.

"Gas-pipe Flaherty," muttered the captain affectionately. "If the old man turns back 'twill not be because of a risk, but because it's a cinch it can't be done."

The shoal was ten miles from shore. At

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times the great breakers smothered it in spume, only their thunder warning the vessel that had ventured or been driven in too far. The season was far advanced. Delays, first in appropriations, next in specifications, and then the vagaries of the weather, had left but a slim time to plant the sorely-needed lighthouse before the Fall gales began to take their toll of ships and men.

Once the foundation was planted, anchored to the bottom by the cement-filled cylinders sunk in the mud by the caisson, immovable to undertow and current, the superstructure was only a question of putting on enough men. But the planting crew was limited by the number of caissons needed, and on the job Flaherty had his picked crew of sand-hogs, engine-men and huskies.

Larry Doyle was the only greenhorn, chosen by Flaherty to fill the place of a disabled man because of his heft and strength, because he was Irish, because he had red hair, because he needed the job, because he came from King's County and because Flaherty was a judge of men. Six dollars a day and board and bunk was the pay; that seemed a fortune to Larry. It was a job to make good in and tie to, and Flaherty was the kind of boss that appreciated what was given him, if he did drive the crowd with a gas-pipe in extremities.

Larry didn't find it too easy to make good. Despite his showing against Sullivan, the rest of the crowd avoided him, and he caught side-grins and murmured words that were never addressed to him. He got his orders from the man above him without any explanation, and often he blundered. Once Flaherty let loose a flood of invective upon him for lack of agility that fairly scorched him.

He felt like a clown amid these men, who did their work so thoroughly and swiftly. Had he been on shore he might have asked for his time out of a sheer feeling of incapacity and the knowledge that he was not "one of the gang." But he was on the high seas, and the probability is that he would not have quit anyway. It was not Larry's style. Later Flaherty nodded approvingly at him as he handled the heavy bags of cement, and he thrilled to the acknowledgment.

"They're sore at me because I didn't use me fists," he told himself. "They're thinkin' Sullivan'll knock the stuffin' out o' me whin next we stand up. Mebbe he will, till I get the trick of it, but I said I was as good as he was, an' I'll prove it, if it takes me a year o' lickings."

It was hard, after the long, uncertain-houred day's work was done, to eat without a word from his fellows, to listen to their chaff, to see them pass each other tobacco and matches, to know himself an outsider supposed to have a yellow streak. Once in a while he saw Flaherty sizing him up and supposed that the boss had infallibly heard the rumor of his cowardice.

Meanwhile he had more handicaps than his ignorance. He was seasick with the constant swing of the swell, his legs refused to keep his balance, and worst of all was the vein-flattening atmospheric air pressure when he was made a sand-hog and set to work shoveling away the sand and mud from the edges of the caisson as the mass of metal and constantly added concrete gradually settled to solidity.

But he stuck, forcing away the crawling tiredness, the nausea, by sheer doggedness, his splendid muscles almost automatically turning out the work that was the cause of Flaherty's glances, keenly appreciative of all that the lad was bucking.

The weather stalled, threatened and promised, the wind shifting, the sea contrary. And Flaherty drove them. The expression is hardly correct. He led first and jumped back behind the crowd to drive if they didn't come up to his standard. Ton after ton of cement was pumped from the barges, filling the iron cylinders toward the brim with solid concrete, lower and lower the cutting edge of the big caisson sank into the shoal.

Through the whole mass was sunk a tube like a smoke-stack, through which the sand-hogs crawled. Other pipes carried air to the interior of the caisson, where they worked, and four more tubes served as vents for the sand which was thrown out as the caisson rim cut and the cylinders sank to the point where the foundation floor would rest and the superstructure begin.

Three days and three nights they worked feverishly against the fear of a storm that might come up before the top-heavy mass was anchored, three days when the talk between shifts languished and the men ate mechanically and fell asleep like tired-out dogs. Larry Doyle, unspoken to, heard all of

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what was said. There was no joshing, their spirits were pared too close for lightness. What little was said was technical, a hint of former happenings that might come again, the weather, the general condition.

On the third night Larry wondered whether he was coming down with the "bends." His mind was dull and his whole body was one ache, as if he had been pounded to a jelly. He found he was not the only one.

"Mind the time in Chesapeake Bay?" asked one of the sand-hogs of the man who sat next to him, smoking a pipe before turning in. "No, ye wasn't along. The gas come up in the caisson—we was way down, most as far as we are now—and it fair choked us. We all got out but Bligh, a greeny. He dropped on the floor when the lights first flickered, and we didn't see him for the rush. The boss went back for him—but he'd passed."

They were not kidding him, Larry sensed that; they were merely discussing the risks of the game. And it was a matter for shame that they had left Bligh behind, a stain against the crew that was softly spoken of, and then only when circumstances naturally brought up the subject.

THE next day the sea began to growl in earnest. It seemed to have been amusing itself with the caisson as a cat would with a mouse. Now the time had come to kill. It did not put forth all its strength, it moved almost lazily, with ominous swirls of current and waves that gradually mounted beneath a rising wind until the partly filled cylinders began to take in water, and all the pumps in the caisson worked the limit to add buoyancy and prevent the tilting of the structure.

At noon Flaherty was among the men, lunch was forgotten and both shifts called to the rescue. A dozen men rowed off to the big box from the steamer, Larry among them. A line was tossed and made fast, when a blind breaker reared its bulk and swept the boat down upon one of the cylinders, staving in the planks. Flaherty leaped like a panther to the rim of the caisson and clung there, dragging himself from the sea like a great seal, and helping the rest that clung to the line.

Bruised and soaked, he drove them to the work of stretching canvas across the cylinders, and then he ordered the men into them, beneath the covers, to bail with buckets the water already in them, to cast it out through a small opening left in the canvas.

It was an order to enter a death-trap. The caisson pumps were at their limit. Once let the cylinders take a few more tons of water, and the whole work must tilt and sink, with the bailers struggling under the covers like drowning rats, fighting to get out. The crew were not men of strong imaginations, but experience told them the risks ahead. And they hesitated.

Flaherty cursed and coaxed in vain. One cylinder at the already tilting corner of the caisson was in worst case. Flaherty's gas-pipe was lying somewhere on the bottom of the shoal, gone when he sprang and scrambled to the rim.

"Ye yellow-bellied scum," he shouted. "Stay where ye are, an' we'll go anyway." It was true, the boat had gone, it was peril for another to approach. The tug lumbered about near them, maneuvering, but the danger was imminent, increasing every second. And their fellows were in the caisson under them, laboring to keep the pumps going at top capacity.

"Isn't there a man among ye?" yelled Flaherty. "Then, —— your cowardly souls, I'll do the best I can myself."

He scrambled down into the cylinder with a bucket through the little opening, followed by a dash of spray. As he ducked another man landed beside him. It was Larry Doyle.

"Good boy," said Flaherty. "Have ye a bucket?"

Stung to their cores, the rest followed, and they bailed with straining backs and arms against the cruel fury of wind and sea—and won. Hour after hour the whole force, including the cooks, worked with stone and mud and cement and water, mixed and pumped and packed until the foundation was comparatively safe in a subsiding sea. That night some of the men nodded to Larry, and Flaherty called him by his first name, a mark of signal favor. He slept well that watch off. It had been no test against Sullivan, for he had been one of the men in the caisson, the two were in separate shifts.

The caisson was nearly to its proper level

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in the body of the shoal when Larry came up from his trick and met Flaherty at the top of the stack. The boss's face was worn with the four-days' fight—almost double time for him—and his eyes rested on Larry impersonally.

"Slip down, lad, and ask Shiels if the packing will last on the Number two pump."

As Larry reached the bottom of the tube-shaft he coughed and choked, almost strangling in the sulfureted hydrogen that had been always menacing and now, at the short end of the work, had come with a rush to aid the elements against the audacious ones who sought to thwart them.

The lights were flickering and burning green. With inarticulate sounds the men stampeded for the ladder as Larry stood on the lower rung. He had caught sight of forms toppling to the floor, and he remembered the fate of Bligh on Chesapeake Bay as he had heard it told in the steamer's cabin. The gas hung low; heavy, lying close to the floor in its main volume, waiting to finish the men who gradually succumbed to its insidiousness. Larry swiftly climbed a few rungs and filled his big lungs with clean, sweet air before he descended once more. Sullivan faced him, frantic, scrambling for safety, his terror-marked face looming through the thickening mist.

"There's men down," gasped Larry and smashed into the indistinct features. Sullivan vanished and the next man came on. Larry hurled the fellow fairly on his back and jumped to meet the rush, crying hoarsely to them from a tortured throat and hammering home the words with his fists, while the ghastly fog seemed invading his brain through eyes and nose and mouth.

"There's men down, I tell ye. Get back for them first."

He stooped and picked up a recumbent figure, the second man who had rushed the ladder, and he passed him up to other arms that handed him on to fresh air again. Twelve men were in the caisson, and eleven of them Larry passed to safety. He held no consciousness of numbers, he was numb of all feeling, only his heart responded to the call and valiantly pumped the blood that bound his strength together.

The last man was Shiels, the engineer. Larry groped for him also, swaying, clinging to the ladder with one hand willed into a hook. The Scotchman climbed over him, reached down and got him by the armpit, then a tardy rope flickered down, was placed about Larry Doyle, and he was taken up where the salt air fanned him back to a wink of the eyelids.

"He'll live," said Flaherty. "A —— good lad, Shiels."

"Braw an' canny," said the engineer. "They fair had me stalled wi' their rush. Some fule knocked the spanner fra my hand an' they fair surged ower me when I saw yon laddie stannin' at the foot o' the ladder, spillin' em like ninepins an' yellin' there was men down an' for them to get them."

That was the end of the foundation work. Some of the sand-hogs went back to land again to spend their four days' wages in two hours or less. Sullivan and others were retained because of their experience to handle the superstructure. The great risk was over, the strain lifted and the men relaxed.

All danger was not yet past; only a year before, the light in the main ship-channel to Baltimore had lately been swept away in a gale, with both foundation and its half-built lower structure torn loose and tossed like windstraws. That had bankrupted the contractors and cost nearly a quarter of a million dollars besides before the foundation was righted. But it was easier now. The shifts were regular, and the men joked and skylarked when they were off, instead of sleeping where they sat or chanced to lie. And Larry was one of them.

When one of the crew flung a playful arm about his neck and tried to drag him from his seat he knew he had passed the greenhorn stage, had been accepted as one tried and found true. The yellow-streak idea had vanished. Only Sullivan, with his bruised face, looked askance at him, glowering sullenly with the menace of the meeting after the job was finished.

The superstructure was slowly lifting from the waves that lapped the shoal. The weather was gusty, and at times tempestuous, but the foundation—the test of Flaherty's engineering—stood, vibrantly elastic to the dynamic surge, the firm base of a beacon that should save many lives with its cheering eye and, presently, when the engines were installed, the wild warning of its steam siren. The work was well forward, and it was good.

But the wind and wave were watchful, testing every inch of the lifting edifice,

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flinging sucking crests at the figures that worked, flattening them against stone and timbers, pounding or whining night and day, chafing like a wolf-pack.

A SUDDEN whirlwind roaring above tumultuous water rushed at two men in an unguarded moment, caught them, threw them off balance, flung them down and fled howling in triumph.

Larry Doyle saw them drop into the sea. One of them was Sullivan and one Fenton, the man who had first skylarked with him. Both could swim, he knew that, all "planters" could swim well. Flaherty had asked him that before he gave him the job.

He grabbed a light rope to toss to them when they should reappear, belaying one end. Larry had quickened to action in the past few days. Brain and bulky body coordinated perfectly. He had the makings of a foreman, Flaherty told Shiels. He might go farther than that.

Now he hung poised, watching for the heads to come bobbing up. The seconds passed, timed by his pulse beats, and neither came to the surface. No one else was near. Shouts would be swept off by the contemptuous wind. There was only one explanation, he reasoned. One man might have been stunned and sunk, but hardly two, unless one grappled the other.

They had been caught by some freakish current and swept away, rolled and powerless, striving to hold the air in their bursting lungs, and the water out. Two of the crew saw him as he watched. He signaled to them and they began to climb toward him.

Larry fastened the rope about his waist and tumbled into the water. He did not dive, for he wanted to enter the current under the same conditions as the helpless men. If he fell the same way he might reach the same sub-current and be borne by it directly to them. A dive would be apt to carry him through the stratum of sub-tide.

The undertow grasped at him with its watery layers, binding him, as an octopus might have gripped him in its suckery arms. He felt himself borne resistless at an angle, downwards, downwards. Then he was whirled, spun on the liquid spokes and shot upward, the taste of blood coming into his mouth, his lungs burning, swelling, crying for one breath of free air. Only the vastness of his chest, that had helped him fight the gas, saved him now.

He was jammed against the hard surface of the underpinning, held there and then he began to slide. He started to fight, but the current still kept him captive, though he vaguely sensed it lessening. Then came an angle of some kind and in it, held by the jamming force of that mysterious swirl, two bodies. He gathered them in his arms, felt with one hand for the rope, and yanked twice. Surely the men must be on the other end of the line?

Somewhere in the middle of his brain he kept his will regnant. He was practically exhausted. Soon—very soon—he must recharge his lungs, get rid of the stale and used air that swelled in the cells.

There came a tug at his middle. The rope cut cruelly, but the current kept them against the face of the structure as if they had been held by a giant outstretched hand. One man had to be left.

Reluctantly he let one go, left him clinging like a limpet. The rope swung him up through the currents, up until his red head broke through the surf to the daylight, the air, and the sound of a cheer. Not two men, but a dozen, fished for them with boat-hooks and flung ropes. Flaherty's voice boomed out in orders.

"Let loose," gasped Larry after they had taken his burden. "Sullivan's down there stuck against the wall."

"You can't make it. Let some one else go."

"They won't know where to find him." Larry struck at the supporting hand and slid again into the clutch of the treacherous tide. It seemed ages before he was whirled against something soft and sank his sodden fingers into cloth and flesh. He clamped his jaws against the impulse, the summons, to open his mouth, yanked on the rope and knew no more until he found himself looking up into a ring of friendly, anxious faces.

"Praise be to God!" said Flaherty, solemnly.

Larry closed his eyes again, very content. Then something raw was forced between his teeth and trickled down his throat like fire, warming him, stinging him back to life again.

"How's the boys?" he asked, feebly, after they had got him tucked up in Flaherty's own bunk.

"Fenton's fine."

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"Sullivan?"

Shiels shook his head.

"They are still working ower him. They'll not gie up for an hour yet. He may come back. Now, my laddie, ye'll just tak' this mug o' cocoa and go to sleep. Dinna fash yoursel' aboot Sullivan. I'm thinking he was never born to be drooned."

There was a friendly bromide in the cocoa, and Larry slept through many hours, waking to lie languid in his gently-swaying bunk and idly watch the boss's clothes swing on their hooks in the sunlight that came through the port-hole. After a while Flaherty put in an anxious face that smiled through its grim lines when he saw Larry's eyes fixed on him.

"Bully for you!" he said. "Larry, lad, there'll be a medal comin' to ye for this. 'Twill go outside that chest of yours and inside ye can plant the feelin' that every son-of-a-gun of a 'planter' on the Atlantic will be proud to shake ye by the hand and know ye're one of them. Fenton'll be in to see ye right away, but Sullivan wants a word with ye first."

Tim Sullivan entered to the beck of the boss, tiptoeing across the cabin floor as if he feared a noise might hurt his rescuer.

"Don't go, boss," he said. "I'm goin' to say this in front of the gang as soon as we all get together at the blowout me and Fenton's goin' to give them when we get ashore.

"Larry Doyle, ye said ye were as good a man as I am. That's a lie. Ye're a —— sight better man than I ever dared to think of bein' an', if ye ever give me the call, I'd go through hell to find a glass of wather for ye if I had to fight the divvle himself to get it."

He held out his hand and Larry grasped it.

"Aw, that's nothing, Tim," he said. "Forget it."

TO A PIECE OF FREIGHT

by WILLIAM LAIRD

SWATHED in rough burlap, on the baggage-truck
  Numb in thy bonds, canoe, myself have known
Where thou shalt haunt. Pan grant thee luck
    And welcome to thy place,
  And me the luck to follow to mine own.

Not all thy swaddlings hide thy swiftsure grace.
  Was not thy sister mine? my steed by day,
By night my tent within the space
    Fire gave me from the dark?
  Guide of my wandering, shelter of my stay?

I prophesy, I prophesy, dear bark:
  Friendship of many lakes on thee shall wait;
When beached above the ripple-mark,
    Thou with the woods shalt speak;
  And thou shalt learn the rapids' changeless hate.

When at the last thy skin is patched and weak,
  I pray thou fall no greasy Indian's drudge—
Of blood and fish-guts foul to reek,
    Thine olden beauty gone—
  Nor rot into the shore's ignoble sludge

This rather be thy end: Be off with dawn;
  Take thy last kiss of lily-leaves, and fare
Onward till evening see thee drawn
    Into fierce rapids, where
  Sharp fangs are ready. Lose thy being there.

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THE EYE OF THE HAWK

BY HUGH S MILLER

Author of "The Tent in the Mallee."

IT WAS only natural that Blue Pete, quartermaster of the ancient steamship *Roger Chatham*, should feel upset when he beheld thirteen wild Willydads perched in a row on the side of the ship, leering at him; it was not a sight for a man with sensibilities.

The moon had chosen that moment to peep through the curtain of clouds, a fresh wind was stringing across the sky, and the silvery light gave their hollow eye-sockets and flappy lips a white color which was nothing less than ghostly. And with a slow, inviting movement that made his skin creep, they waved jelly-like arms at him and wiggled thin fingers with the suckers on their tips by means of which they had climbed up the smooth wet side of the ship.

The *Roger Chatham*, fat-cheeked, thick-waisted, was slopping her way from an American port to somewhere in France, loaded to her eyebrows with coal. From boiler-room to chart-house she simmered with repressed excitement. Above on the bridge silent shadows kept sharp lookout, while forward and aft long guns, flanked by other shadows, poked black muzzles into the night. Not a light was to be seen, not a sound heard other than the throb of engines and rush of water alongside.

In a little while it would be time for Pete to take the wheel, a job which would require him to be calm, collected, and alert. And here he was, hypnotized with terror, gazing at thirteen gelatinous Willydads, about as rattled and befuddled as a man could be.

It was simply another of the things he hadn't bargained for when he joined the crew of the *Roger Chatham*. The whole voyage had been made up of things he hadn't bargained for; and though in all fairness it could not be said that any one was more responsible than he himself, he was becoming, to use his own expression, "blame' tired" of it.

This was due in a measure to the unexpectedness of everything that had happened. He had not expected to join the *Roger Chatham;* he had not expected to have to associate with a man like the boatswain or to have his little unhappy trait of looking on the dark side of things, always before respected and fed with sympathy that was comforting to the soul, now made the butt of ridicule by everybody on board; and most important of all, he certainly had not expected to sail into the submarine zone and subject his portly person to the danger of being "boosted to glory" by a torpedo, to quote his probable fate as predicted by the unmentionable boatswain.

No, indeed! He had expected to go aboard the coastwise freighter *Timor*, of the R. T. & Co. Line, lying at the next dock, just as he had been doing for twenty years, roll into a little bunk, consume a little sleep, and then, a little steadier on the feet, arise and do a little work. The *Timor* was content to plug up and down the Atlantic shore

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between Boston and Jacksonville, which was—or had been—quite a different thing from the coast of France, where perils were thick and thorny.

It was only by the merest chance that he had failed in his expectation, the slip-up being due to the fact that the night before sailing he had become exceedingly, instead of, as was his custom, only moderately, drunk, and in some way unknown to himself, and impressing him as most mysterious, had meandered aboard the *Roger Chatham* instead of the *Timor*, and gone to bed.

As a matter of fact, there was nothing mysterious about the affair, if one knew the truth of it. Captain Blatherick of the *Roger Chatham* was anxious to put to sea, but needed a quartermaster. It was just at the season of the year when every place was out of quartermasters; so it looked as if he was not to get one. Returning to the ship this particular night, and happening to encounter Mr. MacHarg, the first officer, he said to him casually:

"I just passed a man with a quartermaster's cap and the funniest walk I ever saw. I think he must be drunk."

MacHarg went out with a pious look, and happening to encounter the boatswain, said, casually:

"There's a man in a quartermaster's cap out there on the street, and he has a roll on."

To which the boatswain responded, sententiously:

"He'd better look out, or some day he'll roll a point too far. Especially," he added thoughtfully, "if he's that pessimistic old lady from the vessel in the notch below us, said to be a very able quartermaster even if he does soak up more beer than is good for him."

Then he strolled down the plank; and happening to encounter Pete, said casually:

"Hi! boy, where you bound?"

"Pier six," retorted Pete, "none o' your business!"

"So'm I," said the boatswain, taking his arm in a friendly way and turning in at Pier seven. "You old rascal, stayin' out so late when you knew I was waitin' for you with a bottle of rum, like I told you out to the graveyard."

"Graveyard?" said Pete. "Was I to the graveyard?"

"Ah, boy, don't tell me—" said the boatswain, "don't tell me you forgot how we laid away the mortal remnants of our dear, dear friend—the dearest friend we ever had!"

"Who d'ye mean?" inquired Pete uneasily.

"An' have you forgot already," the boatswain replied aghast, "how we promised each other never to mention his sacred name aloud, but always cherish his memory private in our hearts—and how we shook hands on it, we did! Ah, boy!" he exclaimed reproachfully.

Pete sniffled.

" 'Twas a terrible loss," he admitted, as they stepped on deck.

"They don't make 'em any more like him!" said the boatswain.

"He was a—this way, boy! Ah, there you are!"

WHEN Pete awoke the next morning, the United States was a smudge on the horizon astern. He contemplated his quarters blearily, then going on deck, meditatively considered the strange features of the old collier on which he found himself, spelled out the name *Roger Chatham* on the ship's bell; and, when his brain finally had put its observations together and made a single deduction therefrom, drew in a breath and expelled it in a remark which was both forceful and sincere.

"Shanghaied, by gravy!" he said.

"Not so," said the voice, vaguely familiar, of the boatswain behind him. "Shanghaied your uncle's stepfather! That's a pretty way for *you* to talk—a man who came aboard in your condition—beggin' us to give him a job so's he could get away from his tormentin' wife. 'She's follerin' me now,' says you, 'with a pick-handle. For the love o' Jasper, take me.'"

"But I got no wife!" Pete interrupted, belligerently.

" 'Take me with you,' said you, 'to be torpedoed and sunk by the Germans! Welcome, Death!' says you. 'Very well, my man!' says the captain, right away sympathetic, 'sign here!' 'If you don't mind,' says you, 'seein' as how I'm all in from runnin', I'd like to go lie down and sign on in the mornin'. They tell me there's a hundred per cent. bonus goes with the pay,' says you, 'am I right?' 'Right's the word,' says the captain. 'It's a smart head you've got.' "

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"It's a case for the courts," said Pete. "Did you say a hundred per cent.?"

"I did," said the boatswain. "Easy money."

"Yeh—easy to lose!"

"Well, if you lose it you don't get it, and if you don't get it you haven't got it to lose and you come out just the same," said the boatswain.

"I suppose so," responded Pete, with a sigh.

"But if you get it and don't lose it, then you've got it to lose, same as if you didn't get it, and you're just as well off as if you'd lost it."

"I guess so," said Pete, "I got no chance neither way."

"The mate's got the papers to sign," observed the boatswain gently. "Step lively, old scout!"

"It's a case for the courts," reiterated Pete.

"A hundred per cent., he said."

"We'll never come back. We'll be sunk, we will."

"The mate——"

"There's Death on the ship! I see his bloody eyes."

"Death's got no bloody eyes. I'll wait for you!"

"Oh, Lord, Lord—I'm doomed!"

"An' then we'll get a little drink."

"Oh! Oh!—" began Pete, and stopped. "Where is he?" he inquired abruptly.

The boatswain took him by the arm and convoyed him to the mate.

"Here's the man that was too sleepy last night to sign on," he said.

"That's good," said the mate gravely. "I was beginning to wonder if he'd changed his mind."

Pete, who had glanced up at the boatswain, now transferred his gaze to the mate, while a puzzled expression came in his eyes. It was still there when he took up the pen and scratched his name in the place set apart for it.

The true character of the boatswain was revealed after this ceremony; as soon, in fact, as Pete had swallowed the nip he had been promised. For it was while his brain still felt its slight momentary exhilaration that he yielded to the temptation to brag mildly about the accomplishments of the quartermaster the *Roger Chatham* had thus acquired.

"She looks like an unhandy ship," he said, wiping his lips, "but that don't make no difference—not to me, it don't. I got rather a neat wrist at steerin' unhandy ships."

"This old bucket'll take all of it you've got, don't worry," said the boatswain.

"I once steered a ship that'd hardly turn in a two-mile circle."

"That's nothing," remarked the boatswain. "When we want to turn this flatboat we've got to drop her iron an' claw her around."

"Gee!" said Pete. And presently, "Y'ever been torpedoed?"

"Once."

"Where?"

"Right where we're goin'."

"Gee!" said Pete. "Didn't you see it comin'?"

"Yeh!—but not soon enough."

"That's another thing," said Pete, triumphantly, "no submarine is goin' to hit us when I'm on the job. I got an eye like a hawk, I have."

"Like a what?"

"Like a hawk. I bet I can see a torpedo comin' four mile away."

"Yes, you got an eye like a hawk!" said the boatswain. "Like a tommyhawk!"

"Like a hawk," Pete insisted doggedly.

"Like a stewed hawk!"

"Like a —" mumbled Pete.

"Well," interrupted the boatswain coldly, "if you've got such a good eye, just watch yourself and see how quick you can get up on the bridge and plant your hooks on the wheel o' this moving mausoleum. Hump, you pickled pessimist!"

And as the disillusioned Pete wrapped a calloused hand around the rail of the ladder and started up painfully, the boatswain called after him—

"I guess you meant like a stuffed hawk!"

"You never mind," muttered Pete indignantly.

"I won't," said the other cheerfully. "But I'll make a bet that whatever it was, they'll pop out like measles on a red-headed kid if they ever spot a little thirty-five-knot hymn-o'-hate comin' at 'em, frothin' at the mouth, full of business and high explosives. And what's more," he tossed wickedly over his shoulder as he moved away, "they sure will have a chance to pop on this trip."

Pete, mounting the ladder, drew his

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foot off the last step with a twitch as if to escape an invisible pursuer, and shivered slightly. He took the wheel, which in this case was not a wheel, but an old-fashioned lever operating the steam steering-gear, and somewhat resembling the tiller of a whaleboat, and settled down to the task of steering the lumbering freighter; but evidence that his mind was not completely on his occupation was manifested from time to time by a shudder, a shake of the head or movement of the lips, and once by a remark which caused Captain Blatherick to scowl suspiciously.

"Like a hawk!" said Pete.

In the early evening a group congregated on the after hatch, and talked of this and that. Pete, coming up in time to hear a few words from a weather-stained ex-halibut fisherman, bent of back and long of limb, did not see the boatswain jerk a finger in his direction as he approached, and speak a word or two.

"I said to her jokin'-like," related the ex-fisherman, " 'Old lady, I've been sailin' the North Atlantic for thirty years and I've been married to you for twenty, and I ain't dead yet for either reason, so it ain't likely,' I said, 'that a mere torpedo can do for me.' 'Well,' she said, jokin' back at me, 'I do admit your head is solid an' your skin is thick and if a torpedo hits you fair you're safe, but what,' she said, 'if it only sinks the ship from under you?' 'Why, then,' I said, 'there'll be a raft o' things come to the top an' I'll just float ashore on that.' 'If that's the case,' said she, 'I'll let you go, but 'twill be a sad day for you if I find it ain't true.' 'It will,' I said, 'and 'twill be a sadder day, maybe, when I find it out myself.' "

"It took a lot of fuss," remarked a ferret-faced individual from Newark. "Look at me. I said to mine, 'So long, Tillie, I'm off to be sunk by the Germans.' 'Good-by, Bill,' she said, 'I hope so.' "

When the short burst of laughter that followed this was ended, a big-boned Swede spoke up.

"Well, I t'ink we get it this time, ay?"

"Sure!" said the ex-fisherman.

"Right," observed the man from Newark.

"It's the truth," chirped a mess boy.

"Absolutely," said the carpenter.

"She'll go kvick when she goes," said the Swede.

"Like a rock," the carpenter agreed.

"How about it?" inquired the ex-fisherman, turning to the boatswain.

The latter shook his head.

"I don't remember ever seein' a ship that was quite such pie as this," he said gloomily. "Fat and short o' wind; single skin so loose it wrinkles, no bulkheads to speak of, and loaded with coal! Say, when it comes we won't even have time to kiss ourselves good-by!"

"Boats all rotten," the carpenter prompted.

"You know it. See daylight through any of 'em. Ropes old and davits stuck. No boat drill; no life-belts that'd float a gull; no nothin'."

"No chance of bein' taken off," the carpenter went on.

"Not the slightest. You can bleat for help all you want to, and what do you get? Reply comes back, 'Message received; state position.' And when you do, what do they say? 'Thanks, old chap; sorry I can't stick around; I'll tell the wife I heard from you.' The most you get is to have someone zig-zag by at full speed and throw you a cork belt and a farewell message."

"That's so!" nodded the carpenter.

"What's more," the boatswain continued, "this old hooker ain't even intended to reach port. Uncle Sam knows it costs the Germans the price of a torpedo to sink us. All we lose is a ship an' forty men an' a load of coal. Naturally Germany ain't got the money to keep that up forever. It's just another way of makin' war on her, that's all."

"Gee!" said Pete involuntarily.

"Hullo!" said the boatswain, "who let *you* out?"

"Nobody," responded Pete sullenly.

"Here's a man," observed the boatswain, "who hasn't said a word about how he happens to be here."

Pete turned an inflamed eye on him and regarded him balefully.

"*You* know how I happen to be here."

The other looked up with an exaggeration of innocence. "Who—me?"

"Yes—you!" said Pete chokingly.

"OH, *THAT!*" said the boatswain meaningly. "I wasn't going to say anything about that." Then he went on, for the benefit of the others: "He came aboard last night so oiled up he didn't know starboard from southeast, an' tried

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to hide in a coffee-pot. 'Pity a married man,' he said, 'and gimme a job. Anything's better than livin' with Bella May,' he said——"

"I told ye I never had a wife," cried Pete in exasperation.

"The worse for you, for takin' a woman's name in vain," said the boatswain sternly.

"Shanghaied! That's what I was—shanghaied!"

"Haw—haw!" shouted the Swede, and the others joined in.

"It's a case for the courts," persisted Pete.

"It may be that," the boatswain allowed, "but I have my doubts there'll be any courts down where this gang is goin'. If you'll take a tip, I'd say write a message to your folks, tellin' 'em the circumstances so they can sue the firm, and throw it over in a bottle. They'll get it some time."

Pete flinched.

"Haven't got any folks," he said.

The boatswain winked at the carpenter.

"Of course, if you keep a smart lookout and see the torpedoes in time, p'rhaps we can dodge 'em, and then you'll get back to the courts, besides bein' a hero for savin' a ship that wasn't supposed to be saved. Maybe," he suggested, "if that eagle eye of yours is workin'——"

"I didn't say eagle."

"That crow's eye——"

"Hawk, I said!" Pete exploded.

"So it was, so it was," said the boatswain. "Here's a man," he addressed the group, "says he's got an eye like a hawk, an' can see a torpedo four miles off, which is generally quite a while before it's fired. Now, I say he ought to be made use of."

"Tell the skipper," said the ex-fisherman.

"Put the old bird in a cage and hang him to the masthead," volunteered the carpenter.

"We'll make him a special lookout, that's what we'll do," said the boatswain. "All those in favor——"

There was a chorus of ayes.

"It's a go!" said the boatswain.

He arose to depart, pausing to give his trousers a hitch fore and aft.

"Remember," he admonished Pete, who regarded him with melancholy intentness, "the lives of forty men hang on them lamps of yours. Keep 'em trimmed, boy—keep 'em trimmed an' burnin' bright!"

This investiture with responsibility thrilled Pete feebly for a second or two, but then his particular characteristic returned, and he shook his head.

"I guess there's no use," he said mournfully. "We're as good as gone already!"

But the boatswain was strolling off, whistling, and failed to hear him.

Several days afterward Captain Blatherick, looking down from the bridge and blinking in the sunlight, said to the chief officer:

"That new quartermaster seems to be gummed to one spot by the rail. I see him there all the time he's off watch. Gloomy-looking duck—what's the idea?"

Mr. MacHarg told him, and his face relaxed into a grin.

"He's on the job early," he said.

"He couldn't see one if it came up and asked him for a match," said the mate.

"Give him time," observed the captain amiably. "He'll begin to see them pretty soon—plenty of them. They all do."

The rest of the men co-operated with Pete in one way or another—generally by giving a little encouragement. The carpenter had a habit of coming up silently behind him when he was absorbed in contemplation of the ocean's wide countenance, and inquiring in a sepulchral whisper that made him jump—

"Seen anything yet?"

And when Pete had shaken his head in the negative the carpenter would say:

"Never mind, old boy—just keep it up! You'll see 'em, all right! I'll bet a keg o' nails you see 'em!"

Then he would go his way, and if any one happened to be near, would do it on tiptoe, with a "s-s-sh!" and warning gesture in Pete's direction. And the other men would take it up, and the "s-s-sh!" would pass along the deck—sometimes even below to the black depths of the stoke hole—so that every one on board could take notice that the crew's special representative, possessing eyes from which no submarine could hide, was at his post of duty and must not be disturbed.

Or the boatswain would come around, and likely as not begin by asking gravely, "How's the old hawk?" and without waiting for an answer, tell him he had just overheard Captain Blatherick, speaking to the naval lieutenant in command of the gun crew, say something mysterious about not all the medals for bravery being won

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on the field of battle—and this right after he had glanced down at Pete!

"I wouldn't be surprised if the President gave you the Victoria Cross or something," said the boatswain confidently, "especially if you stuck to your post and went down with the ship—not far down," he added hastily, "just a little way, so's you could say you did it, and then come back up. The trouble with most lookouts is they get scared and run as soon as they see a torpedo comin' at 'em. Now, there was Bill Gibbs of the *Peter Pan*—he was the kind you want to copy after. He saw the torpedo comin' straight at him, and never moved a foot. Standin' right about where you are, he was——"

"Right here?" gasped Pete.

"Almost the exact point. Maybe two inches——"

He took hold of Pete and moved him a short step.

"There! I should say that's the very spot—just forward of this here swing-scupper. They usually aim to hit a ship about here. Well, he was standin' on this spot, when he saw the torpedo headin' his way. He yelled to the bridge an' folded his arms. 'Come on, you!' he said to the torpedo, fixin' it with a terrible glare. 'I dare you to bust.' And the thing took his dare and busted right under him. And he went down and everything, along with the ship, just as I was tellin' you."

"An' did he come up again?" Pete inquired with painful effort.

"No, he didn't happen to," responded the boatswain solemnly. "But I didn't blame him for that. In some ways I think it was braver for him to stay down."

He accompanied his remark with a knowing look at Pete, followed by a dreamy contemplation of space.

Pete regarded him with puckered brow; then glanced uneasily about the deck.

"I guess maybe I'll go somewheres else," he said. "I don't want no Victoria Cross."

"Remember," said the boatswain impressively, "the lives of forty men depend on you! You wouldn't——"

Pete trembled.

"I'm goin' to get out of here!" he said loudly, and started off; but the boatswain interposed a hairy hand. "Listen! I heard something about you last night."

He cast a glance, with a very casual air, at the bridge above.

"I heard the cap'n and the mate talkin', and the mate said, 'Don't it make you bite your nails to watch that quartermaster lookin' for submarines?' An' the cap'n said it sure did. 'It's the only thing,' he said, 'that helps me endure the thought of bein' sunk.' If that ain't appreciation, what is it?"

"The captain—" fluttered Pete, "he said that?"

The boatswain knocked his pipe against the side.

"If he didn't, I'm a liar," he remarked with dignity, as he moved away.

THE day came when the *Roger Chatham* entered the actual zone of danger. The atmosphere changed immediately. Captain Blatherick snapped orders like whip-cracks; the naval lieutenant on the bridge with him, heretofore an impassive young giant, became suddenly taut, grimfaced, and restless; the lookouts were deadly serious, the gun crews keen and expectant.

Pete looked about with wondering eyes.

"What's up?" he said to the boatswain.

That individual showed signs of joy.

"We're here, boy, we're here at last—right in their huntin'-grounds," he announced eagerly. "They're all around us. We're liable to get one pumped into us any minute now. Jiminy! Ain't it great, boy, ain't it great?"

"Any minute?" murmured Pete, slowly turning pale.

"Any second!" said the boatswain. "Why, before you get your next breath, before you can bat an eye, the whole side of the ship may drop out, and you and I'll be floatin' around out there all wet and muddy. Ain't it excitin'?"

"Oh, my!" said Pete.

"And no one'll ever find us an' be sure we're dead, an' Bella May'll be scared to marry again, for fear you'll come back. Ain't it romantic, boy, ain't it?"

"Gee!" said Pete feebly, his face now taking on a slightly greenish tinge.

"Don't let them Navy chaps up there get first look," the boatswain pleaded. "Get busy, old boy, get busy with the lamps. Didn't I bet a can o' soup against a freckled sausage you'd see a submarine before any of 'em did? Go to it! Look!" he cried sharply, "ain't that one over there?"

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"W-where?" gasped Pete, peering desperately through scrooged-up eyes in the direction indicated.

"Never mind—'snothin'!" said the boatswain calmly, turning away. "But I sure thought for a minute it was all over between us."

He walked on, leaving Pete in a state of agitation that manifested itself in frequent exclamations resembling grunts, and in the settled pallor of his countenance, now faintly yellow.

Captain Blatherick, on the bridge, emitted a growl.

"That quartermaster down there," he said, "gets on my nerves. Stands and blinks at the sea by the hour, glum as an undertaker. Expect any minute to hear him croak, 'Nevermore!' Hey, quartermaster!" he called down, projecting his chin over the canvas dodger.

Pete looked up.

"Don't stand there all day like a mummy! Get out!"

Pete squinted foolishly at the captain's face, almost hidden under the peak of his cap, and the full purport of the command becoming clear to his intelligence, dropped his eyes and gazed about him, and fingered his left ear, like a man very much bewildered.

"Go on!" said Captain Blatherick frowning.

Pete sighed and moved across the deck, his pace increasing with each step until he disappeared into the shelter of the port alleyway with a final plunge as if glad to escape the beady eyes which were boring into him from aloft. Mumbling resentfully, he continued toward the after deck.

He had almost reached it when a voice called him from behind.

"Where you goin', boy?" said the boatswain, standing in the door of his cabin. "Ain't you supposed to be on lookout right now? Jumpin' gingerbread, you're not goin' to lay down on us, are you, boy?" he said, every tone pulsing with appeal.

Pete, whose face had gone darkly red at sight of him, returned slowly.

"Cap'n chased me out," he said.

With swift divination the boatswain discerned the tumult in the quartermaster's breast.

"Jealous!" he exclaimed. "That's what he is—jealous! Think of that, now! Who'd have thought he'd risk the ship an' forty men just because he didn't want an outsider to get a little credit?"

"I don't care about it, I don't," said Pete, brightening perceptibly at this impromptu explanation. "We'll be sunk any minute now."

"Sure we will," the boatswain agreed. "Here, come inside," he added, abruptly.

He drew Pete into the cabin, and after a cautious glance up and down the passage, closed the door. Then from a trunk he drew something which brought light again to Pete's eyes and cheer to his soul. It was a bottle—a large one—and it was full.

"Private stock," said the boatswain, pouring some in a cup. "When you get this in your No. 1 hold, you better sneak up somewhere out of the old man's sight and keep on lookin', an' if you see anythin' comin', yell like blue blazes. You might find a place back of the wheelhouse. How'd that do?"

Pete waited until the last drop in the cup had trickled out on his tongue; then he swallowed it with lingering completeness, and smacked his lips.

"Any place'll do," he said. "Gee, that tastes good!"

"Or the engine-room skylight just aft the funnel."

"Any place," murmured Pete. "How about another little drink?"

"Nothin' doing."

The boatswain replaced the bottle in the trunk, slammed down the lid, and locked it.

"Go find me a submarine."

"Gimme another little——"

"Scoot!" said the boatswain. "Suppose I want to cloud that buzzard's eye o' yours?"

"Hawk," muttered Pete dejectedly, as he slowly climbed over the high doorstep and lurched into the alleyway, still working his lips in an effort to extract from the lining of his mouth whatever particle of taste might be hiding there.

Ascending to the engine-room skylight, he leaned against it and resumed watching for the hidden enemy.

From time to time the end of his tongue appeared stealthily and licked his lips, and occasionally his throat moved as if swallowing something.

This continued even while he was at the wheel. As the hour for his relief drew near, he became restless, and when it arrived, at last, hurried down the ladder.

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His breathing was rapid and his movements jerky, and once, though the night was cool, he gathered perspiration from his chin with a knotty forefinger and nervously flipped it away.

It was then dark. There was not a flicker of light on the ship which might show over the side, and the moon being covered, he had to grope his way down the port alley. Memory, stimulated by desire, led him unerringly to the door he was seeking. He listened; then entered. Presently he was again feeling his way along the dark passage—this time with a bottle in his trembling fingers. He reached the after deck and withdrew to the darkness behind a packing-case in a corner by the rail.

THREE hours later, with the entire contents of the bottle inside him—a fiery, powerful dose, the strength and suddenness of which, like a drug, had benumbed his brain and made his body sick in every cell—he was sitting on the hatch trying to figure something out. Several tablets of his memory had been temporarily misplaced. Of a period of indefinite length preceding the moment he emerged from his retreat to sit on the hatch, he had no recollection whatever.

To the best of his knowledge and belief, he was on the venerable *Timor* of the R. T. & Co. line, where he had spent nearly half his life, but—and this was the thing that agitated his understanding—she didn't look like the *Timor*. He wiped his lips on the back of one hand and his eyes on the back of the other, and gazed dimly and pathetically in every direction in a vain effort to find out what was wrong about her.

It was then he discovered the presence of the Willydads.

The one on the end at the left, who was the largest of the lot and appeared to be the leader, was especially ugly and threatening. The body part of him, fat and green and slimy, was at least three feet long. Appended to this were two skimpy legs, not longer than a man's forearm—just long enough to hook under the top of the iron side of the ship; and from the upper part extended two arms as long as a full-grown ape's, but much thinner, being about the thickness and flexibility of a blacksnake.

The head was pointed in front, in size about as big around as the inside of a soup plate, with wide mouth hanging open. The faces of all of them were working constantly with the most amazing movements, as if they had St. Vitus's dance—one instant grinning diabolically, the next glowering horribly—but despite these contortions and the hideous undulations of their arms, making not the slightest sound.

Pete's hair stood as nearly erect as it could, under his cap; his eyes bulged perilously and his heart raced alarmingly. He had heard of Willydads from men who had had dealings with them. One, in particular, "Whisky Jimmie" Foley—who insisted when he was dying in the hospital that a Willydad was sitting on his chest at that very moment, resisting all his efforts to push it off—had told him many curious things about the creatures. In the first place, he said, they never were in a hurry. They might sit for hours and gloat over a victim before they killed him.

When they were ready, they would creep up on him slowly—so slowly—inch by inch—always making those terrible faces; until at last they would put their slippery arms about his neck and pull themselves up—still very slowly—and clamp themselves to his skin. And then, leading off with the biggest of the flock and proceeding in turn down to the very littlest—who might, however, get only a drop or two—they would fasten their lips over his mouth and suck the blood and life right out of him. "Whisky Jimmie" said the sensation was like having somebody tickle the bottoms of your feet with a long straw stuck down your throat.

With this and more in mind, Pete was in a very bad way. He couldn't move, he couldn't think—he was bound body and soul in the fetters of fear. Not a person passed to whom he could appeal for help; the ship, to all appearances, was deserted. For what seemed an age he sat, rigid with dread, staring at the Willydads; while they continued to regard him with pleasant anticipation, and wave to him with ghastly playfulness.

What would have happened if an unusually heavy cloud had not passed in front of the moon just as the eight-bell chime rang out, thereby rendering them invisible at the moment the imperative summons sounded, is too awful to dwell upon at greater length. The fact is the

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tones of the bell, striking upon his consciousness at a time when the spell of the Willydads was weakest, impelled him to rise and, in accordance with habit long established, climb the ladder to the deck above.

He had actually reached the wheelhouse and taken the helm before the cloud moved on and the moon again bathed the sea and ship with its soft light. It revealed Captain Blatherick, two mates, the boatswain, and the naval lieutenant tense and motionless, peering over the water, and, faintly, Pete in the wheelhouse, maintaining himself in an upright position with the friendly aid of the steering lever.

Captain Blatherick, who wanted no light at all, greeted the return of the moon with an audible curse; Pete, of the same notion for a different reason, stole a sideways glance to port to see if the hateful Willydads had followed him. He was relieved to note there was no sign of them on that side.

First making sure, by a dull but crafty look at the captain and boatswain, that he was not observed, he deflected his gaze to starboard—and let out a groan; the Willydads were engaged in mounting the rail where, back of the bridge, it turned in close to the wheelhouse. As though trained to the dot, the thirteen of them reached the top together, swung their legs over, planked themselves down in their seats, and grimaced in at him with such obvious recognition and gratification that he positively whimpered with fear.

His situation now was far more precarious than before. The creatures were close enough that their arms almost touched the ledge of the open window at his side. Added to this was the distressing fact that the leader of the flock appeared to be growing impatient. There was a cruel calculation in his manner and scrutiny that filled Pete with pangs of foreboding. He could not take his eyes off him. He thought of the feeling of those wet arms about his neck and repulsive lips on his, and his heart turned to lead.

Forgotten was the ship and the helm; forgotten was everything but the one dreadful individual who was eying him so thirstily. Still clutching desperately at the steering lever for support, he cowered and shrank slowly away from that side of the wheelhouse. With the softest sort of hiss, the steering lever, being so constructed, turned with him.

And then the thing he was staring at leaped soundlessly from the rail to the ledge, and clinging to the side with one hand, reached in the other to seize him. With a squeal, Pete hurled himself at the farthest corner of the wheelhouse. And again uttering a gentle hiss of protest, the steering lever turned with him, this time as far as it would go.

With his back to the wall, Pete continued to tug frantically at the lever as if he thought he could free himself only by pulling it out, and watched the waving arm and long grasping fingers moving through the dark, coming nearer . . . nearer . . . gradually nearer. . . .

Outside on the bridge Captain Blatherick was fuming at his luck.

"Oh, that moon!" he complained, almost beside himself. "They wouldn't want a better light. Who's steering this ship?" he demanded suddenly.

"That old fellow," said the boatswain. "He's usually pretty steady, sir. Holy smoke!" he cried, springing toward the wheelhouse, "look at her turn!"

"What the ——," said Captain Blatherick, jumping in the same direction and beating him in. Entering so quickly the gloom of the interior, his eyes made out dimly the black bulk of the quartermaster, but saw nothing of the tell-tale panic in his face.

"Watch your course!" he snarled, and in a flare of anger caught him a smash beside the jaw that broke his hold and drove him head first into the back wall.

At a yell from outside he turned. Mr. MacHarg, a weird figure in the moonlight, was bouncing up and down excitedly, pointing over the side to port. The naval lieutenant was jabbering into the telephone transmitter on his chest.

Captain Blatherick and the boatswain darted for the rail, and were in time to see the track of a torpedo traveling the ship's length from stem to stern at a rapidly diminishing angle. The helm being all the way over, the *Roger Chatham* was swinging in a short circle, sweeping her after-part out of the path of the onrushing danger as if fully aware of her peril. For a few unnerving seconds the race continued, and then the line of froth, with a final bend, which nearly gave them heart failure, as it

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felt the suction of the ship, shot behind it and plunged on into the empty distance.

In the meantime Pete, recovering from the impact of his head with the still harder wall, had looked about in a dazed fashion, entirely unaware of the excitement. He had a vague impression that something had happened, but no idea what it was. The jar had not sobered him, by any means, but it had helped in that direction.

It had shocked him out of the mental paroxysm which had possessed him, and reduced him to a state of ordinary intoxication less hectic and more familiar. Perceiving that the helm was untended, he took it with an air of mild surprise and methodically proceeded to stop the ship's turning.

When this was done he glanced out inquiringly and, his eye resting on the boatswain, considered the grave indignity he had suffered as the object of that gentleman's bantering tongue, while regarding him with a look of the most intense reproach. Suddenly he scowled ferociously and, with a little difficulty, drew himself up to his full height.

"I got an eye like a hawk!" he said in a bold, defiant whisper. Nothing coming of it he repeated "Like a hawk!" in a weak treble which also, though louder, expired almost on his lips and went completely unheard.

"Take that old fool off the wheel and put some one else in there!" snapped Captain Blatherick a moment later.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a heavy, grinding shock ran through the ship.

A long, glistening mass rose partly from the water under her bows. She trembled, listed, reared back, then—while the men on the bridge stood dumb with horror—charged the thing with all the weight of her nine thousand tons driven at top speed, rolled it over, and trampled it beneath her. There was a scraping — distant, sinister—under the hull. It ceased, and the *Roger Chatham*, with a shudder, scurried on.

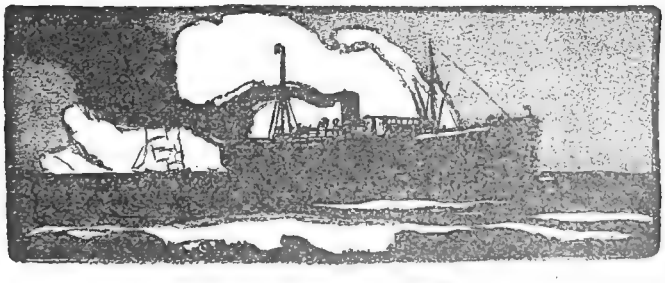
"Poor devils!" said the naval lieutenant jerkily.

THE profound silence which followed was broken by a voice from the shadows in the wheelhouse. It was a low voice, but raucous, fearless, triumphant, and it carried well.

"I got an eye like a hawk!" it said.

Captain Blatherick and the boatswain swung around as if on pivots. On the captain's face shone a great light of understanding, tempered with honest contrition. The boatswain's voice, when he spoke, was a compound of awe and admiration.

"Darned if you ain't!" he said.



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THE LAST CUP of TEA

BY STANLEY HOFFLUND

YES, I know Henry is mighty sore at us; in fact I feel reasonably certain that he's been plotting a double murder since it leaked out how me and Hennessy cleaned up on that Magdalena Bay pearl deal. You see we forgot to invite Henry to join us, though he had been with us in a number of small deals, and had developed a deep conviction about being indispensable to our operations.

How Henry ever got wind of our trip down there is beyond me and Hennessy. Both of us thought those three Japs killed old Ricardo Smith before they happened to fall off the schooner. And before we left we didn't let Ricardo get close enough to Henry to drop any tips about the place where the power launch, *Satsuma*, went ashore with her hundred-thousand-dollar cargo. The mescal bill ran high—but that's a great drink for keeping a man named Ricardo where you want him.

The less I tell you about Magdalena Bay pearls, the better you'll enjoy your sleep. But if you'll keep it between me and you and these two steins I don't mind telling you why we cut away from Henry the first time we got a chance to put over something really big.

He'd been with us over a year, and had always played square, even when he had easy chances to hold back a few hundred. Henry wasn't the man to cheat a pal out of a thousand dollars. I would trust him with that amount in the dark. And he showed plenty of nerve, and ability too, in the kind of operations Hennessy and I liked to tackle —where you don't risk anything much excepting your fool life. What me and Hennessy struggle to avoid is long stretches of labor where you sweat.

Henry is shot full of the same brand of artistic temperament. He's a mighty likable chap too, good company anywhere you happen to find yourself with him. I've seen him set up the house and all the barkeepers liberally one night, and the next he'd be bluffing them all while me and him and Hennessy ate up all the free lunch. It made no difference which end of the bar he operated from, Henry always wore the same smile of satisfaction.

Ain't it odd, and a pity too, how a man like him, who is thousand-dollar square, will sometimes turn out to be penny crooked? That was Henry's failing. And a man who will be on the level in the hundreds, and then frisk you for a jitney—a cup of tea it was in Henry's case—is no companion to choose to help you carry a hundred thousand dollars' worth of salvaged pearls out of Mexican waters. Take it from me it's the littlest things a man does that go to show how he'll behave around the biggest.

IT WAS while we were up in the Mono Lake County that we got the goods on Henry. And the funny part of it is that we were following up a tip of his at the time. He had got in touch with some parties over at Reno who wanted to get hold of certain claims up toward Lundy. They were willing to pay five thousand dollars for them, just as they stood, unpatented.

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Henry knew the claims, and didn't believe them to be worth the price of jumping; but he didn't have any reason to discourage suckers who had fallen in love with them five thousand dollars' worth. So he let me and Hennessy in on the deal, wiring us to meet him in Reno as soon as the Southern Pacific could toot us up under the snow-sheds of the Sierras.

When we arrived we found Henry as full of information as the town was of divorce hunters. He had the deal all framed up this way:

The hick who owned those claims—his name was Hawkins or Rawlins, or something servile like that—lived over in Bodie, where he always Wintered, working in the mines. During the warmer months, when the snow is only a few feet deep up in those altitudes, he prospected around for gold and trout, locating everything in the shape of a mineral prospect that had enough boulders on it to build location monuments with.

According to Henry this bug had the location habit even worse than most victims of the yellow lure. He had posted his notices on so many claims that he couldn't possibly keep up his assessment work on a tenth of them, so he relocated as many as he could as often as the mining laws allow. Henry found out that Rawlins—or was it Hawkins—hadn't done anything with the claims we were after, having either forgotten he ever located them, or not having had time to get around to them yet.

Any way the chances were that he'd put off remembering them until eight or ten feet of the snow up there had melted, which would be long after New Year's day—which always has been an occasion celebrated by turkey eating and turning over new leaves in the plains, while it is claim-jumping time in the mountains.

Such being the case Henry couldn't see any logical reason why we should go to Bodie to make a dicker for these claims we were after. We were hale and hearty men, well fitted by nature and equipment for a short dash into the snow-capped peaks around Lundy.

Why not go right to the claims, and do business on the ground New Year's eve? Mr. Rawkins wasn't at all necessary to our transaction, in fact the less we had to do with him, the better for all of us.

Henry proved to be a past-master at locating other people's claims. He knew just what kind of notices to have drawn up, and just the correct time to give notice. He was well heeled with all the required papers and stealth when we got aboard the train again. We got off at Thorn and took the stage to Hawthorne.

The railroad used to run through Hawthorne, but it moved away on account of some kind of a row it had with the town, leaving nothing but a depot and the grade where the rails used to be. The citizens of Thorn always kind of emphasize the Haw in Hawthorne, like they were laughing at it for being left six miles in the desert from transportation. You'd think the Hawthorners would either burn down that ghostly reminder of their past in shape of a railroadless depot, or change the name of their city.

We arrived at Bridgeport on the Twenty-fifth of December, to find the town chuck full of Christmas spirit and impatient people who couldn't get farther up into the mountains because of a big blizzard. The only mail they'd been able to send through to Lundy for a week had been carried by a young Canadian on snow-shoes. Things didn't look at all promising for our appointment at those claims on New Year's eve, and we felt kind of gloomy between drinks until Hennessy, who is a chronic optimist, reminded us that the same blizzard which barred us also stood between Lundy and Mr. Hawkins-Rawlins, of Bodie.

If he should suddenly remember that he hadn't relocated up there, or if the buyers Henry had on the string should have double-crossed him and gone direct to Bodie with their five-thousand-dollar offer, causing Mr. Rawlins-Hawkins to not only remember but to become eager to retain his title—well, it would be a man-size job for him to arrive ahead of us.

But loafing around Bridgeport wasn't conducive to peace of mind under the circumstances. We just naturally fretted ourselves to death for three days and nights, picturing a purposeful man from Bodie daringly defying the elements on a snow-shoe trip to five thousand dollars' worth of blizzard-bound quartz.

There might not be any particular danger in delaying until the storm broke, and yet again there might be. Hennessy's optimism prevailed again.

"We can't be more'n froze to death," says he; "so let's hie to the shoe store and

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get fitted with a pair of snow-shoes each. I think I wear a ninety-nine size."

We did just that. And New Year's eve found us thanking Heaven for having arrived alive at a goat camp in the Mono Lake Basin, only a few short miles from the claims. Henry knew the country better than he knows his Bible, or I wouldn't be here now to buy you another drink. Snow-shoeing may be sport for the hardy Norsemen of Minnesota, but not for a son of the sunny South. The less said of the ear and two fingers of mine that froze, the better 'twill be for the brevity and purity of this tale.

The goat camp was a deserted building constructed of bull-pine logs, rough boards, and cyanide cans. It was a fair shelter though, with the snow drifted over it. We were so tired and frozen and generally desperate that it looked almost inviting. We actually hated to leave it.

But, having gone through so much already we decided to keep right on until we arrived at the claims, where we would post our notices at one minute after midnight, and then be able to freeze to death with our minds free from any worry about being beaten to the money. There was a stove in the shanty, so we thought we might as well cook up a bit of bacon before hitting the trail again.

Henry, as usual, started right in to do more than his share of the work. He built the fire and washed out the frying-pan with snow. Then he put a pot of snow on the blaze to melt.

I'VE saved up telling you about a fatal blunder of ours at our last camping place—which was another goat camp, a twin sister to this one. Being ready to drop from fatigue—which means being all in—at that last place, we had carelessly left a bag containing some of our most necessary reserve supplies hanging on a nail in the door. We didn't notice that when we shut that door our bag was mechanically shifted to a position on the cold outside of the shanty.

In the morning Henry, out of bed at the first crow of the cock as usual, discovered that the bag was gone. The snow had stopped falling during the night, so we could clearly see a long, winding, mocking trail of wolf tracks, which was the only clue we had to cuss at.

In that bag was all the tea, coffee, and sugar we had beside the small amount which might be left in the cans already opened. All our whisky was in it too, except for one infant-class swig Hennessy had left in his pocket flask. But what we missed most was the tea.

I don't care how hardened a drinker a man may be, he prefers hot tea when he's up against the kind of cold that kills. Down around the barrooms he'd be ashamed to order a drink like that; but get him where it's a case of choosing drinks to save his life and he'll swear by tea to the last gasp.

Henry came roaring in with the bad news.

"We're up against it, boys," says he. "There's not an ounce of coffee or tea left in the other kit. That —— —— —— wolf has sure busted up our party by hogging all the best refreshments."

"——!" says Hennessy.

He was a sorry picture to look at, for most of his face had been froze. But right away his optimistic smile cracks its way through.

"Never mind," says he, "we've got plenty of snow for boiling."

The game son-of-a-gun! I'd have given my interest in that five thousand right then and there to have been able to offer Hennessy a cup of boiling hot tea. I was craving it myself like I never craved drink before —and you know me. Hennessy had fared much worse than I had; and I knew well just how badly he wanted a drink of it right then.

Henry, muttering and cussing over our hard luck, was busy making a fire to fry more bacon and melt more snow. It would help a lot, hot snow water, but if we only had a wee pinch of tea to put in it—my God! how good it would have been to smack thawed out lips over!

Hennessy helps out the meal a bit by whacking up his pitiful little swig of whisky with us. After that was gone—nothing but hot snow water for ours until we got back to Bridgeport again. I was for making Hennessy swallow that last drink himself; he was so much littler and gamer than Henry and me. But he wouldn't listen to it.

"I've got one thousand six hundred and sixty-six dollars and sixty-six and two-thirds cents' worth of hot tea comin' to me as soon as Henry closes up our deal in Reno," he says, with a weak grin that made me want to hug him.

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And here we were, near the end of our trip—the end of all our trips, for all any of us knew—without anything hot to drink but boiled snow water. Henry had gone over everything in the kits a dozen times, trying to dig out or cuss out a little bag he remembered that had a pinch of black tea in it.

We couldn't help him dig any, our fingers having been froze worse than his, but we did our share of the cussing. He gave up finally, the icicles dripping from his mouth, where they froze from watering for a cup of hot tea. Hennessy was all broke up over not having another swig of whisky to divide with us.

We rushed through the bacon. It was good, —— good; but — ——! I don't want to bore you with tea, but — we sure missed it. We tried to smack our lips over the cups of scalding snow water Henry poured out for us, but it was hard to get them together properly.

Henry talked about being near the end of our troubles now—just a quick dash of six miles up the mountain, then the New Year's eve event, and back again for a trip down to Bridgeport as fast as we could force our snow-shoes. Henry seemed to have withstood the hardships better than me or Hennessy. He was still able to show some enthusiasm over our deal.

While me and Hennessy packed up the kits Henry went outside to get his bearings, as he put it. He carried his cup of snow water, fresh from the boiling, out with him.

YOU know, there's something mysterious about the way me and Hennessy get hunches together. Time and time again I've noticed that our thoughts seem to be sort of close-coupled. There was nothing to arouse suspicion about Henry's recent habit of drifting off alone to get his bearings. He was the guide, and it was up to him to save us any unnecessary hard traveling. And it was perfectly natural for him to take along his cup of hot snow water.

Maybe it was an unusual eagerness in his stride this time that made me and Hennessy look out of the door at the same time. It was careless of Henry to do what he did so close to the shanty, with the moon out strong on the white snow. But then he had reason to be impatient, as we soon discovered.

There he stood, not twenty feet away, in a light you could have read a newspaper by. He was shaking something from a little paper bag into his cup of scalding snow water.

He wasn't doing anything out of the ordinary—under some conditions. Just brewing himself a little cup of tea.

He'd found that bag he pretended to hunt so hard for, and, unlike poor little Hennessy with his last swig of whisky, had held it out on us.

I didn't murder him. Me and Hennessy together wasn't strong enough to then. He was too many laps of hot tea ahead of us. No, I waited, and so did Hennessy. Judging from the hollow rattle of that paper bag there couldn't be more than one good cup of tea left; and we had important work to do before Henry could get off alone to drink that one.

We went on with him, and we finished cinching those claims before we went back to the goat camp. We decided to have breakfast before taking any sleep. Hennessy managed to pour a quarter of a cupful of salt into Henry's cup of boiling water before he took it outside with him on another reconnoitering trip.

We watched him, Hennessy and me, through a crack. First he looked around, like a thief; then he emptied his little bag into his cup. It was his last pinch of tea, as we'd guessed. He sniffed it lovingly for a minute, then took a big drink.

Never have I heard such cursing as came from Henry after he'd spit out that mouthful. He threw the cup into the snow and stamped on it. Murder was in his eyes and his soul—over a cup of tea.

But he finally saw us standing in the doorway watching him. Then shame choked off his cursing.

We didn't mention salt all the way back to Bridgeport. And Henry ordered coffee at the hotel, while me and Hennessy swilled tea—gallons of it.

Now you know why we didn't let Henry in on a big deal like the one we pulled off at Magdalena Bay.

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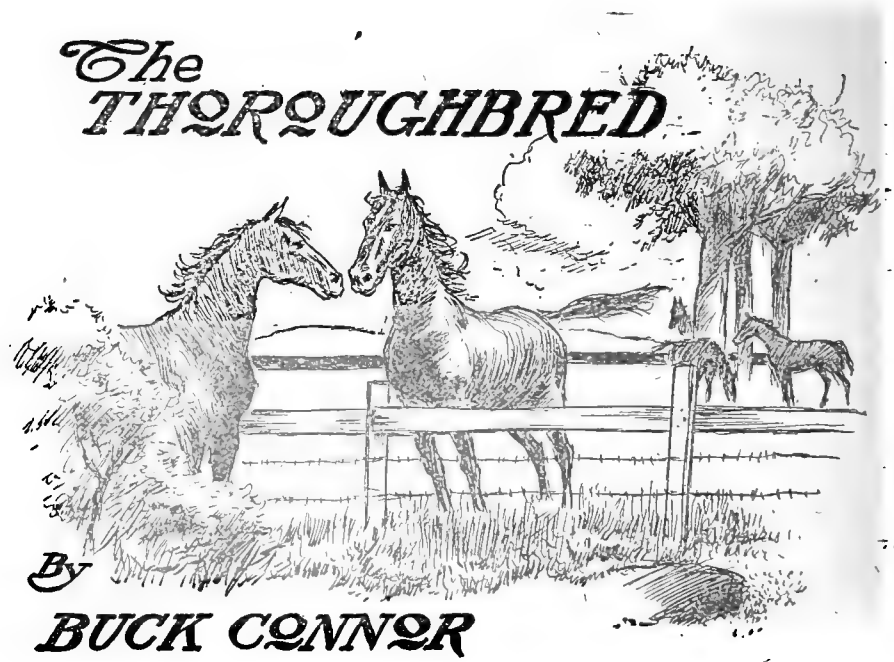
The THOROUGHBRED



By

BUCK CONNOR

Author of "The Diary of a Pack-mule."

THE first time I met Norma, was along about the time when I used to see her cavortin' around Stillwell's pasture. Norma was nothin' but a little colt then, and her mother, a chestnut of the finest coat one could wish, used to be warnin' Norma most of the time about wire-cuts that hosses get when they hit the fences.

It was a dandy Spring day, and I was runnin' with another youngster—I don't know what we was playin' at—and we was right close to the rich man's field. I had just stopped in time to keep out of the wire, and was about to turn and run back to where our mothers were feedin' when I looked over there in the shade of a big oak, and saw that little girl colt or filly as I learned later to call 'em.

She was a purty picture as she stood there in the sunlight with her little starred forehead raised in the style that was doggone becomin'. She was a thoroughbred filly; and here I was just a plain Steeldust colt. It wasn't right for me to nicker to her, nor it wasn't the thing for her to come lopin' over to the fence and rub noses with a plain range-bred colt.

Well, I looked at her for the longest time—my mother nickered to me several times about my gapin' so much, but I just couldn't keep my eyes off of Norma. Of course, I didn't know her name then, but that's all right, 'cause it didn't take very long for me to find that out.

Her folks didn't make camp out there in the field at nights like we hosses did. They had a little shed on the north end where they would head for when the sun began slippin' down over the edge of the sandwastes.

Well, this first time I'd clapped my peepers on her, her mother was just pointin' the bunch to their night camp, and as she went lopin' off to join the bunch I accidently caught her turnin' round to take a last look at me. Right then and there, I went plumb locoed over her—I just let out the happiest whinny I could. My mother scolded me to beat the devil for it, too.

"Nice howdy-do, ain't it? You, the finest colt in the outfit makin' a fool of yerself by hollerin' yer blamed head off at strangers like that!"

Bless them dear mothers, you know how they worry over the durndest things. I never neighed back to my mother. No, sir. I knowed a dang sight better'n to do that.

That night when we had made our camp, and I was just nibblin' around close where mother could see me, now and then I'd come to myself, and find that I'd been gazin'

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out across the Stillwell flats—it sure was hard to keep my mind off that filly—and then mother called me and said it was time I was beddin' down, and to git right inside the circle as fast as I could 'fore she'd lambasted me hard.

After the rest of the horses had gone to sleep 'ceptin' Glass Eye—he was doin' his trick at watchin' camp—I eased up on all fours and sneaked out quite a ways—I was just dyin' to be alone with my thoughts—and then I tried to figger it out. I wanted to know that filly and I wanted to talk to her, too. What could I do to make her speak to me, or fix it up so's I could speak to her?

In the Stillwell bunch of stock, there was a burro—I don't know how he came to travel with 'em, unless he run errands fer 'em or somethin'—and I noticed him grazin' right close to our line-fence. I wondered if he could be trusted enough to tell him something. But he might just blab everything to that filly's mother, and then there'd be the dickens to pay. I said to myself, says I:

"Ole kid, you've got to take a chance on it." And I did too.

The next mornin' when the sun was flarin' across the range, red like, as it busted through some horizon clouds, we all went over to the water-hole and had a drink. Some of the bunch wanted to stand there and gab a while, but I told my mother I was kinda hungry and she told me to go on out and go to eatin'. She told me which way to head out, so I just ups and walked as if I was goin' to head back toward the bed-ground, then I sashayed around and pointed my tracks due north—right the way the filly would be comin' from their camp—and chawed grass in a nibblin' sort of way, and kept my feet movin' all the time toward the edge of the field.

The other horses followed my lead unsuspectin' like and it wasn't long before I was right close to the fence.

Then I turned square around and grazed back toward them as if I was just fillin' up. I got to wonderin' where her outfit was at. But right *pronto* I caught a glimpse of 'em out of the tail of my eye as they swung in from the east and rounded to the south. Gee, I can see 'em now.

It was the funniest feelin' I ever had. I was gettin' durn shaky in my legs—I've since heard it called buck-fever—but I stood ready to face the music, and I was purty dang cert'in there was goin' to be music, a heap and plenty, too.

It was gettin' nigh on to time for stock to be huntin' up a little shade and a place to lay down and take a *siesta* 'fore that Stillwell outfit reached us. They was all scattered here and there over several acres, but right in the tail-end of the bunch was the filly, and close behind her, with a weather-eye peeled on her colt, came the mother. The burro, a frazzle-faced little clay-bank was on the outer edge, facin' the west, but well up in the lead of 'em all.

Our own bunch was headin' back toward the brother-oaks, as we called the two big trees where we most always rested in midday. My mother was on the far side. We all was just as busy as you please grazin' and switchin' flies.

THEN I started me a big circle toward the burro, and when I thought no one was lookin', I'd do more walkin' than eatin', and purty soon I rounded out right across the fence from him with 'bout a hundred yards or so 'tween us.

"I find it purty good feedin' in under the wires on this fence, pardner," I nickered at him, soft like to keep the rest from overhearin' me.

He raised his head with a jerk, and pointed them long ears toward me and stopped chewin', and then looked at our bunch as they keep on strollin' toward the big trees.

"What was you sayin' about feedin'?" he brayed back in a polite way.

I told him about the nice tall grass that was just under the bottom wire on his side of the fence. That got him. He turned and looked at his outfit, and then as if he was stealin' somethin' he drifted right over to where I was eatin'.

"This is purty good chewin', ain't it?" he mumbled as he dropped his head down into the grass right close to mine. "I don't happen to git much grass as tender and sweet as this on our range."

Well, we grazed down along that fence till we was out of hearin' of the other stock, and then I socked the question to him, 'bout like this:

"Can I consider you as my friend—one that wouldn't blab everything he knows?" and I looked him plumb square in the eye as I shot it at 'im.

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You know it isn't every day that a burro can walk along and graze in company with an honest-to-goodness range-bred colt and they know it. It never has been considered polite for 'em to even speak to hosses without a dang good excuse, and then only in mighty careful tones, now I'm tellin' you.

"Look here, sonny," he said after takin' another look at his bunch to see if all was well, "I'm a whole lot older than you are, and I come dang nigh knowin' when and when not to say, yes and no. There's not a single hoss or burro livin' that kin point to ole Bullet, that's my name, and say I ever laid down on him in a tight place or give 'em the double C. I ain't built thataway 'tall. An' if I tell you I'm with you and we rub noses on it, it goes with me, no matter if it comes to short grass and dry water-holes or what, it goes that's all."

"Bullet," says I, "Bullet, my name's Monte—Monte, and we all belong to a poor hard-workin' cowman just over that rise back yonder—I'd like awful well to know that little chestnut filly that's feedin' over there. The one standin' behind her mother, and has a little star in her forehead. Can it be fixed up so's we could get to talk to each other?"

Then I just waited patient for his answer.

"Sure it kin," he brayed softly to me as he looked over my way. "Just you stick around here till I feed over that way and I'll wise her up to it. I won't be long and I won't be comin' back here—that'd look dang queer to the others—and she'll most likely drift over after a little herself."

Then he swung himself around and skirted the herd, nibblin' here and there as an excuse to get where she was without causin' any 'spicions.

I never could get Norma to tell me what that bonehead said to her, but it wasn't any great spell till I happened to notice hoofs in front of me. They was smaller'n a full-sized hosses' and I knew it must be hern. Gee, but I felt awful bashful, at first, 'bout lookin' up.

When I did raise my head to look, I looked square into the prettiest eyes I ever laid my peepers on. They was brown—yes, mild brown—and her eye sockets come to sort of a peak like at her forehead with just enough white showin' on the edges to make her look as cute as could be. And she was smilin' at me out of 'em, but I just stood there and looked at her.

"Hello," she whinnied as she stepped toward me and made to rub noses, which is hoss-fashion on meetin'. "What's your name?" she nickered again and smiled right out of them eyes at me.

"I'm Monte—Hanson's colt Monte—and I just wanted——"

"What a purty name," she nickered soft and took a look out of the tail of 'er eye at her mother, who had raised her head and was watchin' at us.

"I—I like you. What is your name?" I ast 'er.

She stuck out her off fore hoof and pawed in the sod a little and swayed her head from one side to t'other and then rumbled—

"They call me Norma—Norma of the Stillwell herd—and I'm just comin' a yearlin', and we——"

"What are you doin' talkin' to that common colt?" nickered Norma's mother as she come runnin' up, and shot her eyes over the fence at me. "I've told you never to bother 'bout knowin' the horses in that poor man's field—they're not your kind 'tall—so get right back to your own herd. Git!"

My mother heard her neighin' thataway, and she comes lopin' up with the whole passel followin' close at 'er heels—you can't run anything on one of the Hanson herd without dealin' with 'em all—and she wanted to know what Norma's mother was talkin' like that for.

Well, them mares just nickered and squealed at one 'nother there and pawed the air, till they got so dang mad at each other they was about to tangle. Our hosses stood back and never bought in at all. Over in the Stillwell field was that burro, Bullet, a-hee-hawin' as if his sides'd bust at them fool mares fightin' at each other acrost the fence.

After a bit the two outfits quieted down and drifted on their ways to the shady places they used to hang out in durin' the warmest part of the day.

I didn't git to see Norma any more then—the Stillwells kept to the north and we kept to the south,—and 'course I got awful lonesome 'cause I liked her doggone well.

DECEMBER brought some of the dangest cold days one most ever knowed. The cowmen all over the country had already turned their *remudas* loose for the Winter months. We were

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turned into Gold Run Cañon—there was good shelter and plenty of standin' hay—and the bunch was drinkin' out of a water-hole up a short ways from the mouth.

Deacon, one of the best trail hosses that ever perked an ear, raised his head and looked down across the mesa in the direction of the home ranches. He dropped his head and took a couple mouthfuls of water and then looked up again.

"Bird," he neighed to my mother, says he, "Bird, what do you make out of that dust just north of the *bosque?*"

Mother, she walked over to where he was standin', and looked in the direction Deacon told her to. She watched for quite some spell and then turned to him with a little rumble:

"'Pon my soul, Deacon, you must be seein' things—have you been chewin' up any loco-weed of late? There ain't any more dust down there than there is in my eyes, an' I jest wiped 'em out this mornin'."

Deacon looked at mother and snorted his disdain at a fool mare's eyesight. He even told her she must be on the other side of the rise, and must be gettin' old, not to be able to see that bunch a-comin' acrost the flats.

"There's ten full-grown hosses and some colts, too," he nickered right at her. "We've got to locate our claims here for bed-ground right *pronto*," he told her and started nosin' about to find the most likable place.

Deacon was a long time on the Hanson range and was in most respects, the oldest and best hand in the *remuda*. He always kept a lookout to see that the wimmen-folks, as he called 'em, and us youngsters didn't get into trouble. He made us keep our places, too.

After a little he called us together and layin' out the camp, he nickered:

"We want to hang together until that outfit makes us some sign of their doin's in this section—you colts just keep your mouths shet when they come up—and if they don't mind tellin' us, we'll find out just where they're supposed to range for the Winter."

The place he picked out would please any pusson of the range. It was a little pocket in the cañon that was all surrounded with thickets of buck-brush and had a cut-bank of rock for shelter from the north winds. There was a tiny trail—just a one-hoss affair that run in from the water side of it. It was as cozy as a box-stall to sleep in, too.

"Howdy, fellers?" brayed Bullet, as he come walkin' up to our bunch—just a few steps in the lead of the Stillwell outfit—and tossed his head at me.

"Right well," Deacon replied. "How you all?"

"We're all well, but we're kinda off our trail—we're huntin' for Lobo Cañon. Do you happen to know where it is?" neighed a big bay hoss, as he stepped in between Deacon and the burro and took charge of the talk.

"Lobo Cañon lays just north of here 'bout twenty mile, I'd figure it. Just foller the foot-hills and it's the fourth one—you can't miss it," Deacon was glad to inform him.

The bay thanked us, and pointed his herd down out of our place. As he hit a lope on the trail, he asked us to visit 'em sometime up there. He said that some others of the Stillwell herd had moved out there a couple of days before.

Others of the Stillwells were out there—that sure primed me for thoughts. I wondered if Norma was in that bunch. But she and her mother was thoroughbreds and mebby old man Stillwell would think a couple of times 'fore he'd send them out there for Winter range. I said nothin' but sawed wood, as the sayin' goes, and set about layin' my own plans to get our camp to nosey up thataway some time right soon.

WELL, things went along purty smooth with us fellers in our bunch till the snow come good and proper. There was an eighteen-inch fall of it the first shot out of the box, and then a light rain, which froze a heavy crust on it.

Deacon wouldn't allow us to amble too far away from camp in Gold Run—he talked about the water-holes bein' all froze up; and the *lobos*, as I learned they called the black timber wolves, would be out scurapin' around for somethin' to eat—and he watched us to see that we minded his orders, too.

One day there came sunshine—so balmy like and warm—and he said we could go out on the trail toward Lobo Cañon, if we'd be willin' to let him take the lead and all keep in a bunch. 'Course we agreed to that all right.

I don't just remember how long we'd

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been feedin' up toward Lobo when Deacon called to us to stop where we was grazin'. He said there was a hoss a-comin' down the trail toward us at a run—he never took chances on anything—and that we'd best be ready to lope back to camp.

"What's all this runnin' 'bout, pardner?" Deacon asked of the lathered black gelding that was most out of wind as he stopped short at Deacon's order. "A pusson would think, from your runnin' that somethin' sure had gone wrong."

The black tried to nicker; he pawed the snow; shook his head; gave a great big sigh, and tried to tell us why he had run all the way. The Kentucky colt, as they all called Norma when not usin' her name, had been out somewhere in the hills to the south over two days now. They had all purty near run their heads off tryin' to find her, and her mother had taken sick on account of it. He then told how the older hosses had searched the hills, and in what directions they had went.

Deacon listened to his yarn and turned and looked at the rest of us for some kind of an answer, nary a hoss cheeped—what was the use? Deacon would do as he pleased anyway—and then he nickered so's all hands could hear him:

"Let's go back to camp and get water and then we'll split into small bunches and hunt this here range till every ridge and pocket has been combed clean. I'll take Monte and Dan and Ginger in my bunch. Silver, you and Cloudy pick your bunch and hit trail as soon as we've watered."

Well, I'll be honest 'bout it. I was dog-gone proud of myself right then and there. Hadn't the top hand of the outfit picked me to foller his lead? 'Course, I was now gettin' to be more'n a fool colt—I was a-comin' two year old—and I'd gotten rid of most of my foolishness and could listen to older hosses when they'd try to tell me somethin'.

When I turned my head and looked back, from a pinnacle called Pilot Hill, I could see that the bunches were all gone on the hunt.

"Monte," nickered Deacon after we had quit the ranges most familiar to us, "you get out on my off point there an' keep them eyes of yourn peeled for any shale rock-slides along that cañon, there. Let me know once in a while just how the land lays, too."

I tossed my head to 'im that I would—there wasn't nary bit of use to nicker as the wind was against me—and then hit a trail lope over to where I'd been sent.

We trailed all that day—didn't get started till nigh on to noon though, and was about to make camp for the night. Deacon had sent me to look for water up a little draw-like of a cañon, while he laid out the ground for us.

I took my time goin' up and kept my eyes open for water sign and marked some trees and banks, in case the trail doubled back on itself. I had just rounded the third bend to my left, when I thought I heard somethin'. I listened and then went on slow like. I heard that noise again. It sounded more like a mountain lion's cry—I've heard 'em since—and I didn't know what to do.

That noise was strange to me. I waited. Directly I heard it again. I eased along a little further—purty nigh to the big face rock of the cañon's wall. It got plainer and plainer.

"Who are you?" I nickered loud and waited. But I didn't get any answer.

"Is that you, Norma?" I called.

I s'pose the mentionin' of her name kinda sounded good to her. She whinnied louder and louder to make me hear her—gosh, it was pitiful to listen to it. I located her right away.

Down under the last steep ledge of the face rock, where it was about eighteen hands from the slopin' wall; with her hip sprained, and shins all barked of hide, I found her in a heap. I saw her move in the small brush at the bottom there. I durn near run over her I went in to where she was layin' so fast.

"Norma, it's Monte," I neighed to her as she opened her eyes. "Are you hurt bad, Norma?"

Honest to goodness, I hope I might never swallow this bit of hay, if she didn't actually blubber when I put my nose down and licked her forehead—just cried like I've seen humans do—and then rumbled in my ear that she was so glad I'd found her. She sure showed it, too, the way she ups and laid her head between my two fore legs and looked up at me.

I got busy and broke down all the brush I could and pawed out the big stone and chunks of wood. I then got her to move over on to it and I helped her all I could with my nose pushin' when she'd roll and squirm.

I saw that she was as comf'table as could be under the circumstances. I hurried back to camp—I had walked nigh on three

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mile 'fore I knowed it—and got the bunch.

Deacon snorted to the black to hurry over the hill and tell 'em just where she was, and bring 'em on the run. He showed him the short cut, and then we all went up to where she was layin'.

When the Stillwell herd learned the good news of Norma's bein' found; and had been told 'bout her injuries, they all come foggin' up there like a bunch of sheep—trampin' each other on the heels, they was so anxious to see her—then we just turned her over to 'em, and followin' Deacon's lead we all back-trailed to the Run, and went to bed somewhere nigh on to mornin'. I opened my eyes and rolled over once just as the sky was reddenin' in the east. We all had a good sleep and didn't stir 'bout much till we went to water 'fore the holes were frozen over for the night.

LONG after Norma had gotten on her feet ag'in, and we had seen several changes made in our country, we found that we both belonged to the same man—Hanson, the cowman.

The Stillwell outfit was busted up. They went to South America to handle cattle. They had held a sale, and Bill Hanson who had an eye on Norma and her mother, bought them. Then he just ups and turns 'em both in the river pasture with some of us younger hosses.

One day I was walkin' across the field with Norma—on our way to the river that lay just on the edge—when I saw somethin' move in the brush. I didn't nicker to Norma. I bumped her shoulder and swung my head round to stop her.

"What's up, Monte?" she blurted at me in surprise.

"You know, Norma, a pusson can't take any chances in this country of late. There's too many dang varmints a-lopin' round here."

She didn't speak at all, but just nodded her head in a way that was as understandin' as the deuce. She waited till I give the signal to go on.

It was nuthin' in the world but a big jack-rabbit at work gettin' his evenin' chuck. We went on our way to the river, me tellin' her all 'bout this country bein' no tamer than a coiled buzzer, and so on. She was tellin' me about bob-cats up in Lobo Cañon.

"Why, Norma, there's all the difference in the world 'tween a bob-cat an' a mountain lion," says I, "an' *lobos* don't figger with 'em at all."

"'Course, I never saw one of 'em, but——"

"There ain't any but about it. Why just look at the time my mother and several of our herd was grazin' down in Los Moyos," I tried to argue as we walked along in the soft sand of the river's edge.

We waded out to where the water struck us at the knees, and had a good fill of it, and stood there and brushed flies. Then we settled down on our three legs and rested the other one on the toe and talked it over.

"As I was sayin'," I told Norma, "our herd had been turned loose after Fall roundup, and as usual, they all drifted well up into the hills. They always knew where there was nice bunches of sweet-grass hidden away under the bushes. There they would feed till the first snow-fall, and then drop down to the flats below.

"Well, one afternoon, late like, they was grazin' along on one of the benches just below the timber-line; they had come to a mountain stream, and some of 'em was drinkin', when one of the boys, Chainfoot, I think it was, up and says, 'Boys, let's all swing round here on the south slope and make our night camp under some big live-oak,' and they all hit out at an easy gait."

"Them fellers wasn't takin' any chances on the snow or dark findin' 'em out of camp," Norma rumbled to me, and swung a step or two nearer.

"Exactly, Norma, exactly. But it was a heap longer walk than ole Chainfoot had ever figured it—why night overtook 'em long 'fore they could see the oaks against the skyline.

"Well, they all walked an' walked on that narrow trail, followin' close on the ankles of Chainfoot. Then some of the horses nickered back that camp was just ahead, so Deacon told me.

"After they had all bedded down, exceptin' one or two of 'em—Flaxie was one of 'em standin' near the biggest tree, somethin' comes tumblin' down outa there helter-skelter right on to her back. Lordy! I've seen her back time an' ag'in and it sure is something fierce, the way it's clawed and scarred. So don't think they ain't somethin' to be danged skeered of, Norma."

We stood there in the water a while longer, just spinnin' yarns an' pokin' all sorts of

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hoss-fun at one 'nuther. She'd up an splash me and then I'd pretend I was goin' to bite her, an' so on. We had a fine time till I looked up and saw the sun was slippin' down over the hill, then we just ambled across the field with our tails swingin' and ears perkin' in our happiness.

YOU know when the leaves of the cottonwoods and oaks are faded to a sort of a copper-brown, the evenin's get right cool. It was the time that the wild geese was all goin' south, makin' more racket than was called for; that the wild game season opened, especially the deer huntin'.

One of the boys at the home ranch, Roy, they called him, and anuther feller got themselves all ready for a trip to the hills after some meat. 'Course we was cut out for to go along, Norma and me.

The trail they took was an excuse of a mountain road, with deep-washed wagon tracks which was so nigh on to bein' covered with dead leaves, that a pusson would purty nigh break their fool necks fallin' into 'em. It would slope off down grade for a short ways, and then pitch right up steep as the dickens. There was gray squirrels and chipmunks scamperin' here and there. They was some gnawin' on some pine cones or somethin' else.

We had climbed up about three or four miles, I reckon, when I nudged Norma on the shoulder and said:

"Better not fret so much, and take it easy, Norma. In these mountains you've got to learn to take it easy with your walkin' till you get your second wind."

What do you suppose she said? She just turned them cold brown eyes of hern on me, and looked for a full minute or more, and then snorted out loud at me:

"Monte, a hoss would think, by golly, that I was nothin' but a young colt, and had to be watched and advised on whatever come up. I'm perfectly capable of takin' care uh m'self, and I want you to understand it, too," and she walked off up the hill, just like a woman does—and pouted more an' more and then snorted again, "There now!"

Doggone, but that made me mad plumb through and through. I'd have lambasted her good and plenty only she was a mare. So I just had to sit back an' swaller everything she spouted at me. I was hurt, that's what I was, and she never waited for me to come up to her, so we could rub noses, and make up, like we always did when one or the other'd get peeved.

After we had went on a few more miles, I swung my head around and looked through a clearin' in the timber, out across the valley below to the other range. It was gettin' darker'n a stack uh cats—grayish darkness it was. Why I couldn't see the peaks of the other range at all. It was snowin' to beat the band, and the trees was gettin' white already. The men noticed it too, 'cause I heard 'em talkin' 'bout gettin' up on some flats—Poker Flats, I think he called 'em—before she hit too heavy.

When we reached a place they called Mizer's Mine, one of the fellers, Roy it was, hopped off quick and led me to a big bull-pine, and tied me hard and fast. He was in a big hurry, too,'cause he had just picked up signs—deer tracks was mighty plentiful there, now I'm tellin' yuh. The other man he got off, but he didn't tie Norma at all. He just dropped her reins on the ground and followed Roy, cautious like.

"There's eight or ten in this bunch, Roy," I heard him say, and they lit out through the timber and was swallowed up by the forest.

The snow was fallin' awful fast. It was gettin' purty darn deep up there. It's always the heaviest in the higher country. The trees was so covered with it a pusson couldn't see more'n a hundred yards or so at best.

Do you know that filly just walked over to the edge of the shelter of the tree and left me standin' there and said nary a word to me for the longest time? Finally I got feelin' so dang lonely I ups and says to her soft like, says I:

"Come on over, Norma. I didn't mean to hurt your feelin's honest I didn't. I just wanted to warn you 'fore you'd hurt yourself walkin' so fast. Come on over, please."

Well, sir, she just turned her head toward me, with a little snort of disgust, and blurted out:

"Aw, fergit it, Monte! Can't I have a poutin'-spell once in a while without your goin' and gettin' all upset over it?"

Then after a short spell of waitin' she walked over to where I was standin', and we rubbed noses and made up. Right there I loved the very ground she was standin' on. I ain't ashamed of it either. I told her so,

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too. She put out her nigh fore foot and pawed lightly in the snow, and swung her head shy like, and said she liked me, too. Then both of us didn't say a single word for the longest time.

It wasn't so awful long after the boys went on the deer's trail till night come on. Now, havin' night come on you right in the middle of one of them snow storms, in a wild country, ain't what it's cracked up to be. The wind blew strong, and the trees just swayed and heaved. The snow was so wet and cold, I thought sure I'd freeze, standin' there with not even a slicker throwed over my back. Norma was loose and she started walkin' a circle around the tree, and kept right warm by doin' that.

We waited and waited. It snowed and kept on snowin'. I was almost numb now.

Norma was worried about me and kept up her askin' me every once in a while how I was feelin'.

There wasn't any moon that a feller could see by at all, but 'long toward mornin'—I can't remember just what time it was—I got a feelin' that somethin' was wrong, some way or other; either the boys were lost or dead or hurt, or I was goin' to freeze. You've had them feelin's yourself.

Somethin' was wrong, and right about then, too. I was standin' there an' shiftin' my weight on my legs, and tryin' to fergit I was cold. I had swung myself around with my tail into the wind, when it shifted a little to the south.

I heard a sort of a noise that wasn't the bendin' and strainin' trees, and was just peerin' out in the darkness tryin' to make it out, when all of a sudden somethin' lit right smack-dab on my back. It was a mountain lion, and he dug me deep and I squealed from the pain. Honestly, he took a hunk outa my neck, right at the withers, that'd fill the half-peck measure they feed us our oats from.

Do you think Norma turned yeller and quit me? No sirree, that filly heard me, and saw me battlin' somethin'. She just came a-pawin' and snortin' and squealin', and seein' that I had slipped and fell on my side, with the lion on top, she ups and lambasts him in the ribs—and he unloaded.

But mountain lions ain't no quitters themselves. They keep a-comin' at you! I'd no more'n got to my feet when he snarled and leaped on my back again. Whew! I can feel them claws of his'n now. I happened to think of a low-hangin' limb where I caught my saddle horn on just before I shifted when the wind changed, so I plunged right under it as far as the rope'd let me, and scraped him off my neck.

'Bout that time, Norma whirled and shot him another mess uh heels. He clawed at her, but she met his strikes with an off hind foot that bunged up his head consid'able. So he then figured he'd had more'n a plenty, and sneaked off through the bushes, and forgot to come back for more.

I wasn't cold now. Somethin' warm was runnin' down my shoulders to my knees. I smelt it and it was blood. My sides they was bleedin' and I was gettin' kinda weak. Norma said she had a little cut on her hock, but nothin' to amount to anything.

ALL that night, we waited and listened and looked—but the boys never came. I got sick, long toward mornin', and Norma come over where I was and laid her chin up on my withers and sympathized with me. That helped a whole lot, now I'm tellin' you.

It was hard to tell when daylight did come—the snow was so blindin' thick. We figured the boys had went home and left us. That hurt me, to think they'd quit us in a storm when we had nothin' to eat. Some men will do that thing. I tried to think of 'em as bein' off the trail.

To be off your trail in a snow-storm is not so dang nice, if you ask me 'bout it. Why many a hoss has walked right over a ledge of rock or a cut-bank in a snow that was fallin' so thick they couldn't see. They most generally broke a neck, too. And I've heard of men—range-men who live in the open all their lives—that went to feed the stock they kept at the home ranches, and either lost their trail and froze to death or fell over somethin' and got killed. So either way, it wasn't cheerful thinkin'.

"They ought to be comin' back purty soon," Norma would nicker once in a while just to cheer me up, as I lay there with my sides a mass of frozen-dried blood, and too weak to git up. "They've been gone four feed-times already."

But they didn't come that night, either. Well, I was mighty nigh ready to give up the ghost, as I heard a feller call cashin' in his last chip. I didn't ever expect to git up on my feet again. I thought it all

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out as bein' just a matter of waitin' till the warm sleep took me.

Once in a while I'd take a look at that filly as she walked around me slow and kept watchin'. Every few steps she was stoppin' and lookin', first up the mountain, and then down toward the flats. She never once took her eyes off the brush around us. She was expectin' just what I thought might happen.

She was afraid of that mountain lion comin' back or timber wolves comin' in a pack and finishin' me. They will always take advantage of a hoss that's down—or a steer either, fur's that goes—and gang on to 'em and make short work of it.

The next mornin' brought a real sunup—doggone, it was bright as a July sunrise. It helped a whole lot to keep up our hope. I told Norma she'd better back-trail to the ranch, and then, mebby, they'd know that we was all in trouble, and come with help. But she wouldn't move a hoof. She said if I went over the divide she'd stick with me.

Doggone it, it helps to know you've got some one that's willin' to stay with you to the last ditch, and then some more. I've never felt that any one else would be put out very much, 'ceptin' my mother, of course, if I just laid down and made a die of it. But here was some one who would have shared her last wind with me, if I got short, and she thought it would help me.

It was late that third day—the sun was 'way down, when I could git a look at it. Norma was tired and she laid down 'longside of me for the first time since we had been there, and right off the reel she's closed her eyes in sleep. I looked at her and just worshiped that filly. 'Way down inside somewhere I had an ache—but she laid there and didn't know it at all—bless her heart!

I heard some kind of racket down below us, but I was too weak to git up an' look—and anyway, I hated to wake Norma up—'specially if it was more bad luck a-comin' our way. She'd git to know it soon enough. But it wasn't no bad luck at all. It was a bunch from the ranch that Roy and his pard had brought back to help hunt us.

Them boys had plumb lost theirselves that first night, and they'd lost me an' Norma worse than theirselves—'cause next day they climbed a pinnacle and found where they was at—but they'd been three days locatin' us hosses. That shows what snow will do toward disguisin' a country.

So they hadn't forgot us at all. They'd been losin' sleep and wallowin' through snowdrifts tryin' to find us—and I guess they was about as tickled as us hosses was, when they rode up where we was.

They come up and dismounted easy like, and stood still and looked at us. Then they looked at one another. And ole Deacon's rider—Big John, the boys call him—said:

"Don't that beat hell!"

Well, I didn't care if Norma was layin' with her neck across the one clean spot on my withers, and sorta snorin' in her sleep. I figured she'd a right to snore, doggone it. She fought off that lion, and took all the tricks at night-guardin'; and she done it without any whinin', too. And she wouldn't quit me when I needed her most, like some folks do. And by golly, I love her, and I'm dang proud of it! 'Cause in every hair of her chestnut coat she's a thoroughbred—that's what she is.

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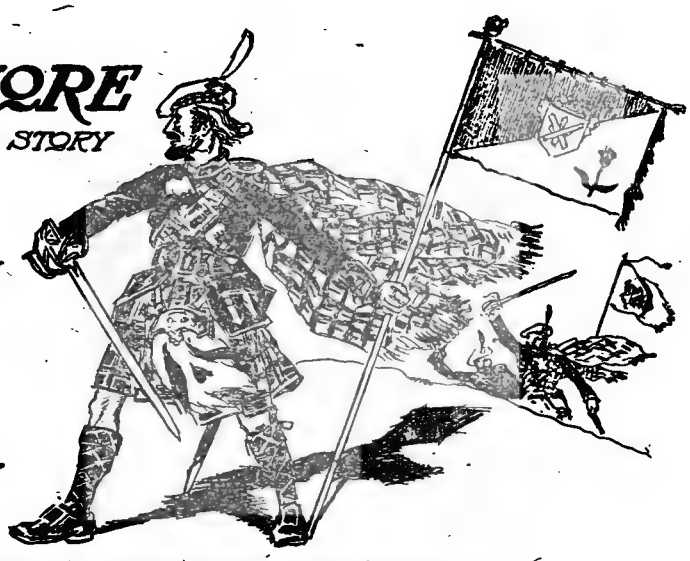
CLAYMORE

A FOUR-PART STORY



PART III

ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Author of "Contraband Matrimony," "Fair Salvage," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

"A LOST cause, lad, is no starting-point for a successful career," argued my good uncle.

But to me the Stuart cause seemed far from lost. I was intent upon joining the army of Prince Charles Edward Stuart who had won all Scotland and was now in the heart of England.

My wishes finally prevailed and I, Francis Chisholm, of Chisholm Castle in Suffolk, twenty-two years of age, rode out across hostile England to throw in my lot with Prince Charles. The long ride to Derby was pleasantly broken by the company of one Robert Sawtelle, a chance acquaintance of about my own age.

In Derby, I called out sharply to a slim lad in Highland kilts to learn the way, but he refused to answer. I grabbed his shoulder and promised him a whipping for his discourtesy. Instantly he was at me with a dirk and I gripped his youthful wrist.

At that minute a tall brawny Scotchman came running across the street with claymore drawn. But, strangely enough, the young lad called out: "Do not be hitting at the Englishman, David. He means no harm."

"Are ye haudin' our young leddy?" asked the gigantic David of me fiercely.

"What young lady?" I asked, puzzled.

He pointed to my young captive.

"Are you a woman?" I asked blankly.

"Yes," was the startling reply.

This young girl was a Miss MacRoss, head of a Scottish clan, and David was one of her clansmen.

I rode on to Headquarters and my uncle's friend, Sir Thomas Sheridan, took me to the council chamber where sat Prince Charles and his advisers.

"A recruit, your Royal Highness," cried Sheridan.

"'Sblood but you are welcome!" said the Prince. Then turning to a commanding man of about fifty he continued: "I hope, Lord George, this will convince you we do not lack supporters in England."

But Lord George, turning to me, replied:

"There are no more than six thousand of us, mostly Scots. His Royal Highness thinks we should march straight upon London. We deem it best to retire to Scotland now and await a more favorable time to strike at London."

At length the judgment of Lord George prevailed, and the Prince gave instructions for the retreat to start before daybreak.

Headquarters was so crowded that I made a bedroom of an unoccupied anteroom by the entrance. In the night I was awakened by a voice saying:

"We will put the prisoner in here."

The door was opened and the prisoner pushed inside. Before I could speak the door was shut again. I silently made a light and recognized Sawtelle, my companion of the road.

"I am an officer of the King, within your lines, out of uniform," he said soberly.

"But you have not gained information such as you sought?" I pressed.

"No, but your commander would not believe it."

"I believe you," I returned, "I shall help you."

Adjoining the room was a small closet with a window. I pointed to it.

An instant later I was snoring heavily. Then the door was thrown open and a light glared in my face. There stood the Prince and a Highlander.

"'Tis Mr. Chisholm. Zounds, Mr. MacRoss, you have laid by the heels my own aide-de-camp," exclaimed Prince Charles.

But this MacRoss was not my friend David of the ready claymore. Presently I learned that he was known as the Master of Gairloch.

"This is not the man I put in here," protested the Master. The Prince opened the closet door.

"'Swounds, Gairloch, that way flew your prisoner," he cried amusedly. "'Tis no matter. I am not sorry to be able to avoid sentencing one of my own countrymen to death."

After the Master had gone the Prince turned to me. "There's a man I can not fathom," he said. "If he tastes blood he will not be satisfied."

"Is he chief of the MacRosses, sir?" I asked, recalling the young lady I had mistaken for a boy.

"Although the Master is a MacRoss," replied the Prince, "the titular chief of the MacRosses is a slip of a girl who insists upon riding at the head of her wild clansmen—and who is one of the boldest campaigners in our army. Some generations since there was a split in the ranks of the MacRosses."

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Early next morning the retreat was begun. The Prince beckoned me to him and said: "You are now Captain Chisholm. I am lending you to Lord George."

Lord George ordered me to ride and find the Clan Ross—either Miss MacRoss, the chief, or Ian Dhu MacRoss, captain of the clan.

"They are to have the post of guarding the rear," said he. " 'Tis an hereditary right they claim."

I found the MacRosses by finding the gigantic David. Presently a gray-haired man with the manner of a warrior appeared. "My father," explained David. "He will be the captain."

I delivered the message. A second regiment of Highlanders appeared, led by the Master of Gairloch and who left the line and came to my side.

"Why did you not come to me with his Highness's order?" he asked.

"Because yours is not the Clan Ross," I answered.

"Sir!" His claymore was half out of the sheath. "Know, sir, that when you are instructed to carry orders to the Clan Ross you are to come to me."

"There has been no mistake," I answered, "my instructions were to carry orders to Miss MacRoss, chief of the Clan Ross." His face flushed purple.

"I shall not forget you, Englishman," he said as he left. "You shall feel my sword!"

As I turned, Miss MacRoss and old Ian Dhu MacRoss were standing at one side.

"Now you are our friend," she said. "You have humbled the Master of Gairloch and risked his enmity. There is not one of our clan, Mr. Chisholm, but will hold you brother for your act."

Miss MacRoss told me of the fate of her father.

"We found him murdered, the dirk in his back," she said. "He had no enemies save the Gairlochs, but there was no proof. We have waited ever since for vengeance, but our time will come. And that is not all," she went on, "this Summer they were for arranging that I should wed with the Master."

We encountered English armies on our retreat northward, but won through. Sheila MacRoss was ever in the thick of the fighting. Once I rescued her from what seemed certain death. Later, I donned the kilt and plaid of the MacRosses and became practically a member of the clan.

It was after we had reached Glasgow that Lord George said to me:

"Gairloch has been cultivating the Prince. He wants to join the two wings of the Clan MacRoss and himself for chief. Best warn the lady."

At a council of the generals, Gairloch turning to the Prince said:

" 'Tis a thing never heard of before that a clan should be led in battle by a woman."

"We want herself for chief, none other," interposed Ian Dhu.

"What say you, Lochiel?" asked the Prince of the chieftain he trusted above all others. Whereupon this Cameron turned to Sheila and asked:

"What's to become of the succession?"

"I will wed," she answered, "and the gentleman will take my name."

"Have you such a gentleman in mind?" inquired the Prince. And Sheila answered, "No."

Next day when I met the Master of Gairloch he looked at my Scotch plaid and sneered:

"I see you wear the lady's tartan. A livery, I take it?"

I drove my fist into his teeth and knocked him flat.

"Englishman," he sputtered, "you will yet pray for death by sword."

After we reached Stirling I saw little of the MacRosses. They were quartered in a villa outside the city. Then one day when I rode to see Sheila I found that she had left for the Highlands—under mysterious circumstances. The woman in her quarters explained:

"A bow-legged mon told her summat I couldna hear. 'Is he dead?' she said. 'Tak' me to him.' "

David appeared at that minute.

"This will be the Master's work, Chisholm," he said. "We'll be off."

So David, myself and two gillies trotted away in search of Sheila and her captors. On the road we met a pedler, Johnny Gordon, by name. He mentioned having passed the party some hours before. Then becoming confidential:

"The lassie whispers to me; 'Be careful of traitors. Best look for a tall Englishman. If he's there 'tis safe.' "

As we rode on David chuckled:

"Dod, Chisholm, yon was nae more of a pedler nor yoursel'."

The innkeeper at Killin was a precious rascal. I liked not the way he cuffed the serving-girl and I dealt him a hearty blow in return. That night the girl showed her gratitude by urging us to be gone ere we had our throats cut. Then she whispered:

"Ye will find the lassie, in the cateran's hut on the Moor o' Rannoch."

We learned that the bow-legged man was Crooked Sawney, the king of caterans—a villain always out for a dishonest penny.

We pushed on through a country of landless men and outlaws. Next day past midnight we came to Crooked Sawney's hut. Around the fire inside sat ten or a dozen ruffians. We forced the door and were upon them. The smoke was so thick they could not distinguish friend from foe. After a short fierce fight they ran. Behind a secret door tied in a bundle we found Sheila MacRoss.

Arrived safely back at headquarters, Ian Dhu shook my hand and shouted to his clansmen:

"Tak' notice, MacRosses, ye will have a new leader in warr!"

Next day the Master of Gairloch came to see Sheila.

"I thought you might hold me responsible for the attempt on your person," he explained. "It is possible that my misguided father, Lord Gairloch, is the one responsible. I, myself, know nothing."

"Another such attempt will bring great retribution upon the person responsible," I chimed in with unescapable significance.

Who, I wondered, was the man whose reported wounding had stirred Sheila to go on the dangerous quest? Never a word could I get out of her.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CHARGE OF THE CLANS

LORD GEORGE, I learned, was at the Prince's headquarters at Bannockburn House, near the field where Prince Charles's great ancestor, the Bruce, had first established Scotland's independence. He greeted me warmly.

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" 'Swounds, lad, but I am glad to see you back safe—and successful, too, I hope? That's well. I had word of you on the road, but there was no knowing what might have happened afterward."

"Word from whom, my lord?" I asked.

His eyes twinkled.

"Do you recall a certain pedler-man that exchanged chants with your comrade?"

"Indeed, yes."

"Well, he told us of you."

"And who may he be?" I inquired curiously.

"Who did he say he was?" countered Lord George.

"Oh, as to that," said I, "he told us we might call him Johnny Gordon and owned it was but one of several names he went by."

Lord George laughed.

"In that case, you had best put the question to him, yourself. I make no doubt you will run across him hereabouts. Now, tell me of your adventures. Is the little maid unhurt?"

He listened to my recital with interest, interrupting occasionally with questions to bring out the reasons which had actuated us to follow various policies. At the end he was kind enough to give me his approval.

"The exploit was skilfully conducted," he declared. "You and David deserve credit from the MacRosses. I wish I might cite you before the army, but as you have already perceived, to do so would be only to stir up trouble. There is no evidence to attach responsibility to the Master, and until there is you must bide your time."

I told him then of the Master's visit to St. Ninians the night before.

"A clever move," was Lord George's verdict. "He made his declaration of innocence before a disinterested witness. 'Twould serve him safely should you be rash enough to make charges against him. But you were right to give the warning. He will think twice before he tries another such trick. Well, lad, you are back in the nick of time."

"How is that, sir?" I asked.

"Hawley, the new English general, is pushed out from Edinburgh and lies now but a couple of hours' march from us at Falkirk. We must fight another battle, whether the Prince's sycophants will or no."

A burst of indignation contorted his ugly features.

"Ah, Chisholm, when I think of the fine men's lives wasted and the time frittered away in this futile siege!" He shook his head. "You have missed naught by your absence. We have used up gunpowder a-plenty, God knows, but we have not even chipped the castle battlements. And the Prince, in his weakness, must needs seek every excuse he can find to dally longer here."

"Why, sir?"

" 'Tis a long story, Chisholm—and not a pleasant one. As might be expected with a Stuart, there is a petticoat at the bottom of it."

Lord George laughed at the shocked look on my face.

"Fear not, lad," he said. "I am not about to preach the disloyalty mine enemies warned you of. 'Tis a fact known widely in the camp. The Prince shortly before you left came down sick of a fever caught on the march. In the house here was a young lady, a Miss Walkinshaw, Clementina, by name, niece to Sir Hugh Paterson. She nursed the Prince, and now—well, he is glued to the place. 'Tis all I can do to make him show himself to the troops."

"But can nothing be done, my lord?"

"Aye, something shall be done," he answered with energy.

He stopped abruptly, and went to the door of the cabinet in which we sat, opened it to make sure nobody was listening outside and then turned the key in the lock.

"Mark you," he went on, when he had returned to his desk, "this is not to be repeated. 'Tis known to none save the generals. I tell you because it will be your duty to help me with the arrangements. Chisholm, I have argued the Prince into giving battle to Hawley tomorrow."

He got up and began walking backward and forward across the room.

" 'Tis a desperate venture, in a way," he said, as much to himself as to me. "Hawley has over ten thousand men, more than eight thousand of them picked regular troops. He has a splendid artillery, three regiments of horse, ample ammunition.

"At the most, I can bring against him a scant eight thousand men, for we must leave twelve hundred here to contain the castle garrison. I dare not move many guns from the batteries. Our horse are few and ill-mounted. The Highlanders will face any troops that ever lived on the offensive, but should the tide turn against them, who

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knows where they would stop? Yet we must fight."

He turned and faced me squarely.

"We must fight," he repeated. "Certes, 'tis fight now or retreat across the Forth, and if we do that——"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"'Twill be the beginning of the end."

I was fired by his enthusiasm.

"Sure, sir," I cried, "there is everything to be gained by a bold front. We should never have come safe out of England had it not been for that."

"You say true," he agreed. "This is the crisis of his Royal Highness's fortunes, Chisholm, but I question if he knows it. Do we defeat Hawley tomorrow, anything is possible. We may retake Edinburgh, lay the Lowlands in tribute and hold the Border, whilst aid comes to us from France and Spain to undertake another invasion of England. But defeat will mean annihilation and for such as I the block."

"And," I pointed out, "'tis also worth hoping, sir, that a victory might likewise divert the Prince's mind. Mayhap, 'twould serve to arouse him again to the seriousness of his affairs."

"God send it will," said Lord George solemnly. "I have done all that in my power lies. For what follows, Prince Charles and Providence must be held responsible."

All of the rest of that day, I was busied in writing and carrying orders to the commanders of the different clans and regiments to bring their men the following morning to a review on Bannockburn Moor.

'Twas generally conceived in the army that such an order presaged adoption of a plan for awaiting Hawley's attack on the site hallowed in Scottish history by Bruce's crushing defeat of the invading English under Edward II. None suspected that the Prince and his generals were resolved to advance against an enemy strongly encamped and numerically superior—aye, and force the issue on him.

THE next day was the seventeenth of January, 1746. It dawned raw and blustery. Masses of dark clouds drove low across the sky; a sullen wind blew out of the northwest. But the Highlanders were used to all weathers, and they marched behind their pipers as carefree as though the sun shone down with pleasant warmth.

Prince Charles was up as early as the rest of us, and I caught a brief glimpse of him in the hall of Bannockburn House, talking with a tall, rather coarse-looking girl, whose mane of black hair grew in a peak over her forehead. Certes, she was anything but handsome, this woman who was to be the evil genius of the last of the Stuarts.

She had one hand on his arm, I noted, and they were murmuring low to each other, she petulant and not liking to be left, he evidently seeking excuses.

"'Twill be but a few hours, Clem," I heard him say. "Bide you here like a good lass, and——"

I passed out quickly, for I did not wish to hear more. In that moment I gained a new view-point upon the splendid youth, who was the idol of nine thousand men, each of whom had pledged his life to the Stuart cause—and not merely his life; but the lives and goods of countless thousands of relatives and dependents. I could not help thinking of the brave Scotsmen, Frenchmen and Irishmen who had died the past two weeks in the shallow trenches over against Stirling Castle, merely to satisfy a Prince's passing whim, a whim the price of which might well be a kingdom and three crowns.

God forgive him! I loved Charles Edward Stuart, as did all of us—for himself and for his ancestors and the tradition they represented. If we had not loved him so much, 'twould not have come as such a shock to find him human—even as ourselves.

Ah, well, 'tis a phase of a sad history I would pass over quickly. Could it be ignored, I should be all the happier therefor. But those who would understand the odd mixture of greatness and pettiness which made up the character of him men called—and history branded—the Young Pretender, must know the spots of rottenness that cankered his fame. To know, I have heard a wise man say, is to understand. 'Tis sober truth, none knew Prince Charles who did not love him, despite his many faults.

The clansmen gave him a rousing welcome as he cantered out before them on Bannockburn Moor. But the review was a perfunctory affair. Lord George at once detached Lord John Drummond with all the cavalry, the royal standard, and the Scots Royals and pickets of the Irish Brigade, to advance straight along the main road from Stirling to Falkirk.

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Prince Charles accompanied this body. The Highland infantry, the principal strength of the army, under Lord George's own command, marched across the fields, forded the Carron Water near Dunnipace and then turned southward, under cover of the ancient forest of the Torwood.

The English were gathering around their camp-fires for the midday meal when their sentries perceived the approach of Lord John Drummond's division, and as Lord George had intended, they took it for granted that this was the main body of the Prince's army—more especially, as they saw the royal standard displayed. At this time the enemy had no knowledge of the nearness of Lord George's column, but their patrols soon discovered us streaming in the direction of their left flank behind the rolling, flat-topped elevation of Falkirk Moor.

General Hawley realized that this height was the key-point of the battle-field, and he sent his three regiments of dragoons, some eleven hundred men, to seize it. His guns and infantry advanced as fast as might be in rear of the cavalry, and the entire English line was pivoted to the left in order to meet our onslaught.

It was now half-past three in the afternoon, and the rain that had been threatening all day came on in torrents, driven in wild gusts by a wind of terrible velocity. But fate fought on our side, for the rain was on our backs and in the faces of the English, blinding them and wetting the pans of their muskets so that they had great difficulty in firing.

Lord George, as was his custom, marched on foot, target on arm, claymore in hand, at the head of the MacDonalds of Keppoch, who, by virtue of hereditary claim, held the right of the first line. Next in order in the first line were the Glengarry MacDonalds, Clan Ranald, the MacRosses, the Frasers, the MacPhersons, the Appin Stuarts and the Camerons.

'Twas a spectacle never rivaled before, and we shall never see its like again—wave after wave of tartan, bonnet plumes tossing in the wind, claymores and target-bosses gleaming through the wet and the pipes screaming above the tempest like birds of prey hungry for the feast of slaughter.

The dragoons gained the moor ahead of us, and the Highlanders instinctively quickened their pace, at sight of which the English reined in, astonished at the idea of infantry charging cavalry up-hill. But their officers urged them on, and they charged, swords waving, trumpets sounding, huzzahing and standing in their stirrups.

Lord George faced about.

"Hold your fire, MacDonalds," he shouted. "Don't fire until I give the word."

At musket-range he gave the order to halt. At pistol-range he cried:—

"Present!"

A wall of flame rippled down the Highland front, emptying a hundred saddles. Some of the English turned and fled at once, but the great majority rode into our ranks, which we opened to let them pass, and the Highlanders sprang at the horsemen with the sword, hewing them from their seats or leaping up behind them and dirking them in the back. Those who passed through our line were attended to by the clans of the second line, the Atholl men, the Ogilvies, the Gordons, the Duke of Perth's regiment and others.

The courage of the dragoons was completely broken. Two regiments turned around and galloped back through the ranks of their own infantry, who were thrown into hopeless confusion by the rout of frantic horsemen. The third regiment, Cobham's, rode off in fairly good order, passing along the front of our line and receiving the fire of every clan, until finally it regained the right of the English position.

The time was come to push the blow home. Lord George heaved up his blade, his gigantic figure monstrous in the shifting battle-smoke and rain.

"Claymore!" he bellowed.

"Claymore!" roared the clans in boisterous response.

Out of the low-lying mist-clouds the steel-tipped tartan waves broke upon the startled English infantry. The Highlanders dropped their muskets as they ran. They relied on their round bull's-hide targets and claymores. The ragged fire of the English front files meant nothing to them. The English bayonets they caught on their shields, and striking at the unprotected left sides of their opponents, crashed through into the rear ranks, where, in the close-jammed confusion, a sword was far handier than a bayonet.

The best infantry in Europe yielded to the clans that day. Wolfe's, Cholmondeley's, Pulteney's, Price's, Blakeney's, Monro's and other regiments, veterans of Flanders, of

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Dettingen and Fontenoy, shrunk from the thirsty Highland blades. The English guns were caught in a morass at the bottom of the hill—fortunately for us, for in the fervor of our advance we had left our artillery miles behind. The English horse were all dispersed, save Cobham's regiment and they were not able to help their beaten left and center.

Within ten minutes after we charged, the English infantry were in abject flight, a scattered mob of fugitives upon the road to Falkirk and Edinburgh. But the unexpected ease of our victory was a blow to what little discipline the clansmen owned, and they began a pursuit which was no less disorderly than the English retreat.

Lord George, by personal command and exhortation, succeeded in restraining the MacDonalds, and sent me to find the clan pipers and bid them blow the recall. The first piper I met was cleaning his claymore by the body of an Englishman.

"Get your pipes," I said. "Blow the clan rally. Haste! It is urgent."

He went on rubbing the gore off his blade.

"Hersel' wullna hae the pipes," he replied without interest. "Hersel' gied 'em to a gillie to hauld. Hecht, but the killin' is bonnie!"

Not a piper knew where to find his instrument. Each, when the battle order was joined, had given his pipes to a servant left in the rear and advanced to have his share in the red harvest of the sword.

"And we call this an army!" rasped Lord George, when I reported my failure to him. "'Odsblood, and a complete victory in our grasp. Look you, Chisholm, we must do the best we can. Run you toward the left of the line and rally all the men you meet. Seek the Prince and Lord John. Tell them I have need of the horse and the French troops. If I can muster enough men I may be able to throw them across the English rear."

I HURRIED to obey him, surveying the situation as well as I could in the mad confusion, as I picked my way among the heaps of dead and wounded men and horses and the littered equipment discarded by the fleeing English. On the right and center the fighting was ended. But from the far left came the regular roll of volley-firing, proving that some section of the English line still held its position.

On a height to the rear of the battle-field the royal standard waved in the midst of the serried ranks of the Life Guards and the French infantry. I was about to change my direction toward, it, when the cavalcade began slowly to advance along the road to Falkirk. I hesitated for a moment, wondering whether I had best await it and deliver my message, but in the end I determined to press on and discover the cause of that sustained firing on the left wing, satisfied that the Prince was moving of his own accord to reinforce Lord George.

I saw few of our people until I reached the edge of the moor. Here I met a string of wounded men, one of whom, a MacRoss, told me that Lochiel, with a mixed force of Camerons and other clans, was having a hard fight with a stubborn body of English, who were not possessed by the runaway spirit of their comardes. The firing grew louder, and presently I stumbled into a line of Highlanders exchanging shots across a ravine with a dim mass of redcoats on the farther side. The clansmen were unaccustomed to this kind of fighting at long range, and they were getting decidedly the worst of it.

A dunniewassel of the Camerons pointed out to me where Lochiel stood, with only the sheets of rain to protect him from the enemy's fire, and among the persons about him I was amazed to see Sheila and Ian Dhu, as well as Stuart of Ardshiel. Sheila gave me a warm smile from under her dripping bonnet.

"I come from Lord George, sir," I shouted to Lochiel to make myself heard above the firing and the storm. "Our right and center have carried all before them. What is wrong here?"

He gestured toward the ravine.

"We are short of ammunition," he shouted back, "and this cursed ravine keeps our claymores sheathed. There are three regiments of the English on the other side, and they are fighting like devils."

"They are all by themselves, then," I returned. "If we can get around on their flank, they will have to fall back."

Lochiel's face brightened.

"That is good hearing," he said. "We will try what may be done."

He went off with Stuart and Ian Dhu to reconnoiter the ground, and I moved closer to Sheila. The rain was soaking her plaid, but she minded it no more than she did the

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English musket-balls that whistled around us.

"How came you here?" I asked.

"I should like to be knowing," she retorted with a laugh. "There was the charge, and then the English dragoons came and we drove them back, and we went forward and after that I remember nothing except a vast shouting and firing."

"You have no business to be so far forward."

"Oh, I would not be anywhere else. It is a fine, big battle—the biggest ever I was in."

"You may well say so," I agreed. "And I pray it will soon be over."

She gave me one of her shy looks.

"And will you be staying with the MacRosses for the rest of it?"

"I will—to see that you get into no more trouble than you should."

She laughed again, but before she could make the saucy reply that trembled on her tongue, Lochiel shouted for us to start the men forward. Ardshiel was left with his clan to hold the ravine and distract the enemy with their fire, whilst the Camerons and MacRosses crossed to the other side under the protection of a small copse. We poured over in a mad, helter-skelter rush, but the English had foreseen our move and were in orderly retreat, presenting a solid front of musketry.

There was nothing cowardly about those soldiers of Burrell's, Price's and Ligonier's regiments, and we lost more men against them than in all the rest of the battle.

Three times the Highland swordsmen dashed upon the enemy; and three times the English beat them off with a merciless flail of fire. As Lochiel was forming his men for the fourth attack, there came a cry: "Dragoons! Dragoons! Watch out for the dragoons!" And Cobham's regiment, that had escaped from the first charge, rode at us from the mist.

My thought was to find Sheila, and I found her, as might have been expected, in the front of her clan, calmly directing the musketeers.

She gave the word to fire, and shielded by their own smoke, the Highlanders charged upon the charging cavalry, claymore against saber, dirk against pistol. Sheila ran straight into the leading English squadron, and struck up at an officer, who came back at her with a stroke that beat her to her knees. He raised his heavy saber for a second blow, when I caught him unawares and knocked the weapon from his hand.

"Surrender!" I cried, and covered him with a pistol.

He turned to me, much startled, wringing his bloody hand with the pain of the blow I had given him— and I saw 'twas Sawtelle, my friend of the Derby road.

"Gadslife, Chisholm!" said he, eyes popping from his head.

The clamor of the fighting was deadened in my ears. I forgot even Sheila huddled at my feet. I saw again the pleasant English country road—and the guard-room at Derby.

"I saved your life once!" I said slowly.

He looked me frankly in the eye, and I knew that he craved liberty, but could not bring himself to ask a second time.

"Ride for it!" I exclaimed, suddenly resolved. "Quick, man—whilst there is time!"

He pulled his horse around like a shot, but he called over his shoulder:

"That makes twice for you! I'll pay the debt some day."

He dodged a Highlander who ran at him, and vanished in the rain and gathering twilight. I was conscious of Sheila, standing beside me, gravely disapproving.

"That man hurt me," she said, rolling back the sleeve of her shield-arm to reveal a spreading bruise. "And you let him go!"

I laughed.

" 'Tis a habit of mine. I let him go once before, but I'm not sure I should have done it this time, if I had seen that bruise first."

"I will be hoping you would not have done so," she answered coldly. "However, I will be too good a friend to say aught of this to any one."

"Why," I told her, "he is a friend of mine, too. Would you have me hurt a friend without need?"

"No," she replied doubtfully, "but——"

"But what?"

"Well, he is an Englishman."

"And so am I."

"Oh," says she, much disconcerted.

And not another word could I get out of her until we had rejoined Ian Dhu and the rest of the clan and taken the road to Falkirk. Then she crept up to me as we slopped through the mud.

"I am glad you let your friend go,"

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she faltered. "I will be hard of heart to talk as I have done——"

"You are no such thing," I interrupted. "You are tired."

"Yes," she said meekly.

I reached out to take her arm, thinking to help her along, and she winced.

"O-oo-ooh!" she gasped.

I caught her as she fainted in the roadway.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FICKLENESS OF PRINCES

"MAKE way! Stand aside, there!" I shouldered a path ruthlessly through the crowd of clansmen that filled Falkirk High Street. Behind me stalked Ian Dhu, Sheila clasped in his arms.

Sometimes a blood-stained Highlander cursed at us in the Gaelic and reached for his dirk, but a word in his own tongue from the MacRosses was always sufficient to quiet his ire.

In the midst of the swirl of MacDonalds, Atholl men, Gordons and Lowlanders of Lord Pitsligo's horse, we came upon David, the rain streaming from his white face.

"Wha' hae ye yon?" he cried brokenly. "Wull—wull she——"

"Is there a doctor about?" I cut him short.

"I wull just see. Come your ways."

He set off at a great pace, mumbling to himself:

"Oh, the sorrow o' the hour the blood-madness cam' ower me! Wha kens but I micht hae savet her frae harrm, if I had stayed by her. A curse on the evil that tempted me!"

"What is wrong with you, David?" I interrupted. "Cheer up, man. She is hurt, but I do not think it is bad."

"Say you so, then?" he exclaimed.

But instantly his face darkened.

"And wha' wad yoursel' ken aboot the like o' this, Chisholm? Nae, nae, we canna be cerrtain."

"Well, it was no fault of yours, at any rate," I said.

"Dod, but it was," he answered, groaning. "Whiles back, when we charrged, I lost her in the battle-reek, and—oh, mon Chisholm, I wull be sair afeared I hae killed her!"

I slapped him on the shoulder.

"You are a great fool, David," I assured him. "If her hurt is the fault of any one, 'tis mine. Now——"

A Highlander, with his arm in a fresh bandage, went past, and I hailed him.

"Aye," he said, pointing toward the village inn. "Doctor MacLeod wull be in yon."

We pushed by the knot of men outside the inn door into the single room that occupied most of the ground floor. It was lit by a fire and candles, and smelt villainously of some strong medical preparation.

A man dressed in brown small-clothes, with his coat off and his sleeves rolled up, was probing at the extended bare leg of a Highlander, who bit his teeth to keep back the groans each time the long tool sank into his wound. It was obvious the doctor was too busy at the moment to serve us, so Ian Dhu sat down in a chair by the entrance, adjusting Sheila on his knees in a more comfortable position. David and I stood silently beside them. The rest of the clan we had left in the street.

After a minute or two, the surgeon gave an extra vicious dig, his patient yelped like a dog that has been kicked and a round object bobbed up out of the wound.

"And there ye are!" remarked the medical man, in a conversational tone. "A braw job, if I do be saying it masel'. We'll just clap a bandage onto that, wi' a douse o' raw whisky—ma simples are all used up this lang syne—and ye wull be richt to marrch to Edinburgh in the mornin'."

He bandaged the man dexterously, cocked his head on one side with a self-satisfied air and gave his handiwork a little pat.

"So!" said he. "And who's next?"

He turned, and the idea struck me at once that I had seen him before. He wrinkled up his blue eyes in a way that was vaguely reminiscent.

"The puir laddie!" he exclaimed, as his glance fell on Sheila's slight form leaning against the bulk of Ian Dhu. "Bring him ower to the licht. Is it steel or bullet?"

"Neither, I think," answered I, striding out from the shadows by the door. "A blow from a dragoon saber caught on the shield that came nigh to breaking the arm."

The doctor eyed me keenly.

"Do ye tell me so?" he responded. "Well, we'll just hae a look."

Ian Dhu gently lifted Sheila into a chair by a table before the fire, and laid her bruised arm where the light shone on it. The mud and grime were spattered over her knees and her kilts and plaid were sodden

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with the wet; but the wistful glamour of her beauty persisted untarnished. The doctor caught his breath as he bent over her.

"Save us!" he murmured. "It wull be a lassie!"

"Hersel' wull be The MacRoss," said Ian Dhu gruffly.

The doctor straightened up.

"I micht hae kenned it," he cried, smiting one hand against his hip. "I thocht I wasna altogetherr a strangerr to the parrty. Come oot where I can look on ye, tall Englishmon—aye, and yon bashfu' giant that wad stick by the doorway. Noo, dinna ye call me to mind?"

"The pedler-mon!' gasped David as he stepped to my side.

"Johnny Gordon!" said I.

He bowed.

"Your serrvant, sirs. But I wad hae ye recollect I warrned ye I changed ma name frae time to time. I'm called MacLeod—Duncan MacLeod—i' these parrts."

"Are you really a doctor?" I asked curiously.

"Aye, sure enough. Doctor in Medicine o' the University at Leyden—and a few other bit trades if that fails."

Ian Dhu interrupted.

"Hae done wi' your havers," he growled. "Ye haena looked to Miss MacRoss's hurts."

"Your pardon, sir," apologized Dr. MacLeod quickly, as he turned to Sheila's chair. "But I wasna forgetfu'. The plain truth is, sirs, the lassie is sufferrin' more frae the harrdships o' the day than the hurrt on her arrm. I wull put a poultice to that——"

He bustled about as he talked, filling a basin with hot water, sifting in a yellow powder and then plunging soft cloths in it.

"—and we wull gie her a sup o' whisky, find a guid woman to look after her and hae her tucked off to bed. 'Tis all she needs, my faith on it."

"You are sure?" I insisted.

"Aye," said he pleasantly, "as sure as I micht be that a MacRoss tartan doesna mak' an Englishmon talk Scots. Ye need hae nae more worry for Miss MacRoss. There is a woman in the inn here can look to her, and she need not stirr. A warm bed, dry clothes and a nicht's sleep wull worrk wonderrs wi' her."

I thanked him, and told Ian Dhu and David I must leave them, as I felt obliged to hunt up Lord George and report what had passed since I left him.

I found the village street more crowded than before, whilst the rain was pouring down harder with the passage of every minute. The confusion was so great that had two regiments of the English come upon us I am sure they would have routed the whole army that had routed them.

Clans were scattered and interspersed; officers had lost their men. One-third the army, as it turned out, had remained on the battle-field, believing that the English had only retired as far as their camp outside Falkirk and that the battle was but half won; other parts of the army were strayed over the countryside, entirely out of touch. Even the Life Guards had lost the Prince, and remained most of the night guarding a certain ridge, when all the time their charge was in Falkirk.

AFTER some difficulty I made my way to a house that had been General Hawley's headquarters and was now appropriated by Prince Charles. It was close on nine o'clock, and gathered in the council-room were the Prince, Lord John Drummond, Sir Thomas Sheridan, Sullivan, the quartermaster-general; the Duke of Perth, Mirabelle de Gordon, the offensive little French engineer, whose pusillanimity the army mocked by dubbing him "Mr. Admirable"; Lord George and a number of lesser chiefs and officers. Until I reached there, none of these gentlemen had any accurate idea of what had transpired on the left wing of the army in the battle.

Lord George listened to my recital in silence.

"Your Royal Highness must see," he observed coldly, when I had concluded, "how narrow a margin existed between defeat and victory through the absence of any officer of general rank to direct the left wing. Had Lord John—" he let his eye fall upon Drummond, whose face flushed as he fumed in his seat—"done as he was supposed to have done, and taken command there, our left, I dare swear, would have been as successful as the right and center, and not an Englishman would have escaped."

"I did not so understand my orders," blustered Lord John.

The Prince looked uncomfortable.

"Would you have had us abandon his Royal Highness?" demanded Sullivan, officiously.

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"Why, I think his Royal Highness had been safe among his Life Guards, even had you descended into the battle, Mr. Sullivan," answered Lord George softly, and a hush fell upon the room, for there had been many rumors of this gentleman's distaste for the front ranks in action.

Prince Charles looked still more uncomfortable, and evidently decided it was time for him to intervene.

"The fault must rest upon my shoulders," he declared firmly. "In the last resort I, and I alone, am responsible for failure and success. I am ready to assume responsibility."

Lord George bowed his head.

"I would point out to your Royal Highness, also," he replied, "that even had the reserve of horse and the French infantry been sent in time to aid our right and center, despite the check on the left, we must have captured a great majority of the English army. I do no more than my duty, sir, when I point out the errors in so important a matter as this. I think I state an opinion which cannot be disputed, when I say that in all probability the fate of our whole venture rested—and rests—upon the issue of this battle."

"The battle is won," the Prince protested. "For the rest, my lord, I, myself, advanced the horse and the infantry reserve to your assistance. And save the Life Guards, who in some way became separated in the darkness, I believe the third-line troops caught up with you."

"Aye, when it was entirely too late," returned Lord George unyieldingly. "Sir, none grieves more than myself to risk the stirring up of differences; but it is incumbent upon me, I repeat, to make clear that this night a great opportunity was accorded this army by the mercy of Divine Providence. It was lost."

"Mayhap, mayhap," said the Prince impatiently. "But we have beaten Hawley fairly, taken his camp and his artillery, routed the best army the Elector has sent against us. I, for one, am not unreasonable. We shall have other opportunities."

"I trust so, your Royal Highness," Lord George agreed.

There was a silence.

"Bid some one fetch whisky," said the Prince to the room at large. "I am drenched."

The whisky was brought and he poured out a stiff bumper—a trick he had now learned, for at the first he could not tolerate the crude raw stuff that serves the Scots for spirits.

"Well?" said he, wiping his lips. "What next, gentlemen?"

Sir Thomas Sheridan raised his hand.

"What next?" he repeated unctuously. "Your Royal Highness must be in restless mood. Hark to the rain! We should be thankful we have a roof over our heads. Pity the poor English!"

Lord George stirred uneasily in his seat.

"I hope your Royal Highness has no thought of resting on our present fruits of victory," he suggested.

"What now?" asked the Prince wearily.

"Why, we must not give Hawley time to rest," cried Lord George, bringing his fist down upon the table before him. "After them, sir, without let-up. Enter Edinburgh on their heels. They are broken, all save three or four regiments. If we follow them with energy, Hawley will never be able to rally an army again."

"Quite feasible under ordinary weather conditions," replied Sir Thomas Sheridan. "But, my lord, you would not seriously suggest sending out tired men in this downpour?"

"Why not?"

"Not half of them have their muskets," answered Drummond. "They discarded them in the charge, and 'twould be impossible to recover the guns in this darkness,—besides which no weapons left on the ground in such weather would be fit for service, without cleaning."

"There is a sufficiency of English muskets here in the village and in the camp," returned Lord George promptly.

"Aye, but the powder is wet," objected the Prince this time. "There is not enough dry powder to fire a single volley."

Lord George stood up.

"Then, your Royal Highness and the staff positively oppose any immediate pursuit of the enemy?" he asked quietly.

"Surely, the futility of the plan must be apparent to you, my lord!" exclaimed the Prince, almost with irritation. "Moreover, would you have us march on, leaving Stirling untaken at our back?"

"Yes."

"I shall never permit it!" The Prince's voice was openly hostile now. "After all

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the effort we have made, all the arrangements, all the preliminary work undertaken! Abandon the siege of Stirling? Never! Why, my lord, we are on the very verge of success!"

He turned to Mirabelle.

"Monsieur Mirabelle," he said, "how long will it take you to subdue Stirling, now that the enemy's hope of relief is frustrated and we have a sufficiency of cannon?"

Mirabelle perked up like a little peacock that has just been noticed.

"In three days your Royal Highness shall receive the keys," he announced pompously. "Let me but open my breaching batteries, and the garrison will cry your mercy."

"You see!" said the Prince triumphantly to Lord George.

Lord George made a gesture of despair, and I could see that the several Scots lords about the table felt as he did, although, out of policy, they had not spoken—for few among them cared to resist the Prince to his face.

"At the least, your Royal Highness," he said slowly, "retain a sufficient number of men to support the batteries and besiege the castle, and permit me to harry the English army with the rest."

"Division of the forces in the face of the enemy?" spoke up Sir Thomas Sheridan. "'Twould be a most unwise proceeding, in my judgment. Most unwise!"

"Quite right," agreed the Prince. "One thing at a time. We have beaten the English army. Now let us take Stirling. After that, Lord George—whatever you will!"

A spasm wrenched Lord George's face, making its ugliness even more appalling. But all he said was:

"As your Royal Highness wills."

THE council broke up without any further debate, and I was about to follow Lord George into the street, when Sheridan caught my arm.

"A moment, Captain Chisholm," he said.

He led me to an inner room, where presently the Prince joined us. Charles was plainly very tired and in an ill-humor. I think he realized that he, himself, had not shown to advantage in the battle, and he grudged Lord George the splendid valor of that single overwhelming charge.

"Well, well, what is it, now?" he asked peevishly.

"You wished to speak to Captain Chisholm, sir," said Sir Thomas.

"Oh, yes, so I did. Well, go ahead. Ask him."

I waited, wondering what was to come next.

"You may remember a conversation we had in Glasgow," said Sir Thomas. "Yes? Well, the developments of the past few weeks have rather tended to confirm our suspicions. You heard Lord George's speeches tonight. They would seem to corroborate stories which have reached us of his disloyal attitude assumed in private. As I told you, the Prince relies upon you to keep him informed of any untoward influence in that quarter. Tell me, have you heard the Prince rated by Lord George?"

I listened to this speech, too dumfounded to make any interruption. From Sir Thomas I looked to the Prince, who leaned back in his chair, eyes half-closed.

"Aye," he murmured, when I delayed answering, "what says old Dragon-face behind my back? 'Odsfish, the man irks me at times!"

Then my indignation got the better of me.

"In the first place, Sir Thomas," I cried, "I warned you, when you spoke to me so before, that I would not play the spy for you or for any man—no, not even for the Prince, himself, however much I may love his Royal Highness! You may go elsewhere for your reports. In the second place, your Royal Highness, there is not a man in your army who loves you more sincerely or more devotedly than Lord George. His only interest is your success!"

The Prince opened his eyes in sleepy surprise.

"I thought you said Chisholm knew his part," he remarked to Sir Thomas.

Sheridan looked uncomfortable, and before he could answer, I burst in:

"Sir, I beg you to believe me when I say your suspicions are not worthy of you. Consider but the commercial aspects of the case. Lord George is twice a rebel, nay, three times a rebel—and once before he has been pardoned. He will not be pardoned again. His brother, that is arrayed against him, hates and fears him. He can expect no mercy in that quarter.

"Further, no one of your commanders

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has been more a thorn in the side of the Hanoverian in this campaign. Do you think he fought today as one who meditates betrayal? I was by his side in the charge, and I tell you, sir, 'twas he led us to victory! He——"

"That will do, Captain Chisholm," said Prince Charles coldly. "I did not send for you here to receive a lecture. It is apparent to me that you have succumbed to the arts of your chief. I am sorry. I had hoped you would become one of my most valuable officers."

Sheridan took the chance to cover his own mistake.

"Had I ever suspected Captain Chisholm of this feeling, I should have warned you, sir," he murmured. "'Tis most unfortunate. The young man has simply succumbed, as you say, to an unhealthy influence."

Certes, I felt sick at heart at that minute. I knew not what my fate might be. I even feared the Prince might imprison me, or take my commission away. And I had loved him.

But I fretted myself unduly.

"'Twas a bad error in judgment for an old hand, Sir Thomas," Prince Charles yawned. "You know the Continentals better than these Islanders of ours." Then he turned to me, slightly contemptuous. "Well, sir," he said, "I must revoke my appointment of you to my staff. 'Tis manifest I can not have about my person a gentleman so unstable in allegiance as yourself."

"May I continue with the army, your Royal Highness?" I asked, trembling.

"I dare say some use can be found for you," he answered casually, and walked out of the room.

"There is the door, Captain Chisholm," said Sheridan.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MASTER TURNS HIS COAT

I THINK that was the saddest evening of my life. The draft of victory I had quaffed in common with my comrades had buoyed me up to heights of mental exaltation, so that the plunge to the depths of dejection was all the more pronounced. Pride kept my back stiffened until I had left Sir Thomas Sheridan, but when I told to Lord George what had happened the tears started from my eyes. For it seemed to me that my usefulness was ended.

But Lord George refused to let me look on my situation in this light, although he was saddened, himself, by the thought of the iniquity that girded the Prince.

"So it has come to this," he said bitterly. "The price of friendship for me is the royal disfavor!"

"Nay, sir, I care not for that," I cried. "'Tis the injustice of it!"

"Unjust?" he answered. "Aye, 'tis unjust, lad, but I warned you once to beware the frendship of princes. For the rest, you have little with which to concern yourself. You have discovered some persons, whom you supposed to have been your friends, in their true colors. Let not your mind be uneasy about it."

"But my commission! The Prince was——"

"He would not venture to take it from you—and if he did," added Lord George with flashing eye, "I should have somewhat to say to him. Fear naught. I tell you they dare not go to more than half-measures, this cowardly cabal of Irishmen about him."

His fist thundered on the table.

"'Sdeath, an my loyalty would but let me hang the crew of them! They are cravens, every man. An we do not put a crimp in them someways, I fear me they will be the wreck of all our hopes."

He calmed himself.

"I shall watch out for your interests, Chisholm," he went on kindly. "Tomorrow you shall be gazetted to a captaincy in my brother Atholl's regiment and transferred to my staff. Now, seek your rest, boy. You need it."

In the morning, I waded through the rain that still poured down in search of Sheila. She was not yet risen when I reached the inn, but David assured me Dr. MacLeod had reported her well on the way to recovery, only insisting that she must lie easy the rest of the day.

Both David and Ian Dhu, who joined us later, listened with interest to my account of last night's happenings, and they strongly objected to the idea of my being commissioned in any Highland regiment but that of the Clan Ross. In fact, they objected so strongly that David accompanied me to Lord George and asked as a particular favor that I might be gazetted to the

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MacRoss Regiment, a request which Lord George willingly complied with.

There was much work for all of us during the day, reassembling the army, directing the clansmen to recover their firelocks and taking account of the enormous stores of booty which had fallen into our hands. It rained all day and all the next night, but from scouts Lord George had sent out we learned that the English were in a pitiable state of confusion, more like a mob than an army.

On the nineteenth, expresses came in from our friends in Edinburgh, narrating how a bare four thousand men of the ten thousand with whom he had set forth had returned with Hawley, and they mostly without any trace of discipline. He had been reinforced already, however, by the Twenty-first and Twenty-fifth Regiments from Flanders, and 'twas rumored other troops were being hurried south from the border cities.

Lord George made one more effort to persuade the Prince to press our advantage, exhibiting to him letters proclaiming the certainty of our taking Hawley's army and the capital by a swift dash.

"I have given my decision," replied Prince Charles haughtily. "I shall return to Bannockburn House in the morning, and we will resume the siege of Stirling."

So, after collecting its spoils, the army moved back to Stirling. One instant result of the Prince's policy of inaction was as disastrous as it was unlooked for. So rich had been the pickings at Falkirk that not a man failed to achieve some valuable bit of loot. When they discovered that there was to be no further advance, and that the sole prospect before them was a return to the hated work of trenching, thousands of the Highlanders decided to go home to visit their families and deposit their plunder.

This movement from the army assumed appalling proportion ere a week had passed. One night, in checking over the returns, Lord George and I found that four thousand men out of the nine thousand we had mustered before Falkirk had abandoned the colors. The desertions were stimulated, too, by the farcical character of the siege operations.

Mirabelle had selected as a site for his breaching battery a rock so thinly covered with earth that it was soon necessary to build up the redoubt with fascines. Our losses in this operation continued to be heavy, far heavier than the total loss in the battle of Falkirk.

Finally, on January twenty-ninth, Lord George summoned a council of the principal lords and chieftains at his quarters, and they drew up a memorandum for the Prince, submitting politely, but in terms that admitted of no dispute, that the situation of the army was such as to present no alternative but its withdrawal to the Highlands.

Our ranks were depleted nearly by one-half, we were making no progress against Stirling, whilst a new and much more numerous English army, led by the Duke of Cumberland, was rapidly concentrating at Edinburgh for a second advance against us.

Perhaps 'twas as a delicate touch to the lesson he designed for the Prince, that Lord George commissioned me to deliver the ultimatum. Certes, Prince Charles eyed me askance when I was announced as the bearer of a cummunication for his private eye.

"What have we here?" he asked, weighing the letter in his hand.

"Your Royal Highness had best read it," I answered.

He had scanned no more than the first two lines when his face flushed and he cursed softly. At the end of the first paragraph he jumped up and threw open the door of the room.

"Sheridan!" he called. "Oh, Sir Thomas, come hither."

When Sheridan had entered, with an evil look at myself, the Prince thrust the letter into his hand.

"Read," he said with a groan. "Oh, my God, Sheridan, that I should have lived to see this!"

He turned to me, as Sheridan, with a hand that trembled, scanned the fateful sheet.

"As for you, sir," exclaimed the Prince, "you may tell your new master—" he emphasized the word unpleasantly—"that—but no, on second thoughts, I prefer not to entrust you with a message. I make no doubts, sir, that you have taken great joy in your errand."

"On the contrary, sir," I replied, "there is as much sorrow in my heart as in your own, and if you will permit me to say so, you have my unshared allegiance."

"I'll be sworn to it!" says he sarcastically. "That will be all, sir. I shall make answer

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to those who sent you when I have given due reflection to the matter."

As if to give point to Lord George's message, the very next day came a brace of developments to confirm the fears he had expressed. The Duke of Cumberland was announced to have arrived at Edinburgh, and Mirabelle opened his breaching battery against the castle, with but three guns emplaced.

The castle gunners, who had nicely taken the range of the battery whilst it was under construction, promptly dismounted all three guns and made a shambles out of it. With it went the last glimmering hope of the Prince's toadies that the keys of Stirling Castle, once the home of his ancestors, would be placed in his hand.

THAT afternoon Prince Charles returned his answer to the chieftains. He gave in, even now, with the greatest reluctance, insisting that he washed his hands of the consequences that might ensue, and ignoring his previous unwillingness to fight, he contended that our policy should favor a vigorous offensive, rather than a retreat.

In the evening Lord George and I waited upon him to arrange the last details of the army's departure. To my surprise, he treated us with decent civility, if he displayed no warmth, and he spent most of the time arguing for a plan to advance against Edinburgh and force the Duke of Cumberland to give battle.

"I tell you, my lord," he urged impetuously, "I know my cousin. He is hot for glory. His failure at Fontenoy has irked him, and he itches for a chance to inscribe his name on a victory. He will fight. We can make him fight."

Lord George shook his head.

"Doubtless, your Royal Highness," he admitted, "but do you think we are in any case to fight Cumberland tomorrow? We have not one-half the men he can bring against us. We have no skilled artillerists to man our guns. Our horses are only half mounted, and illy at that."

"We have not been beaten yet," returned the Prince.

"No, sir, but we had twice the chances in any previous battle we should stand tomorrow. The time for fighting is gone by—for a month or two, at least. We might have taken Edinburgh two weeks ago—or even ten days ago. I doubt we could advance past Linlithgow tomorrow, and from thence I am sure we should return a routed army."

The sullen look spread over Charles's face.

"Oh, well, have it your own way," he said. "You are set upon going back to your dreary Highlands, I can see. But I will not be responsible for this to my father, the king."

"Sir," said Lord George gently, "in the Highlands you will be in the arms of your most devoted supporters. We shall have a rugged country to defend against the invader, and once we have reduced the English forts and the few disaffected clans, you will be as safe as if you were in Rome, until the arrival of the succors you expect to come from France and Spain."

"Aye—if they come," replied the Prince somberly.

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Lord George.

"Do you think the French and Spanish ministries will be quick to send aid to a defeated adventurer?" parried the Prince.

"But, as you have just said, sir, you have yet to meet a defeat. This is but a temporary move——"

"That will not be the version of the English diplomatic agents," answered Prince Charles with a shrewdness he occasionally showed in startling degree.

For once he stripped off the rosy glasses of hope through which he preferred to study the future—and he saw with a clearness that would have disheartened all of us, had we appreciated it at the time.

The retreat began the following day. It was attended by scenes of disgraceful disorder, for the officers of the Prince's staff wilfully neglected their duties, and the clansmen, bewildered by a movement for which they had not been prepared, were at a loss how to conduct themselves. By the time the army reached Dumblane that night, it was in as battered a condition as Hawley's after Falkirk fight.

Here, however, the Prince awoke to his responsibilities, and cooperated with Lord George in restoring order. What was responsible for his change of heart I do not know, but 'tis only fair to say that 'twas most pronounced from that moment. His old kindliness and freedom of manner returned. He mingled once more with the clansmen as he had done on the march into

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England. He was less given to suspicion of those outside his immediate circle.

I have often wondered what factor moved him. And I have thought somethimes that it might have been his release from the dark spell cast over him by that mysterious creature, Clementina Walkinshaw, she, who, in after life, was to be associated with the most repulsive period of his career. Certes, during the next few weeks the Prince was gay again, drinking and gaming with his gentlemen, dancing with such ladies as attended his migratory court.

At Crieff a council of war was held, at which the decision was reached to divide the army into two columns, the one under the Prince proceeding direct against Inverness, which was held for the English, by way of Blair Atholl and the Passes of Badenoch. Lord George, with the other column, was to follow a somewhat longer route along the coast, through Perth, Dundee, Aberdeen and Peterhead, picking up our garrisons as he advanced and bringing with him what arms, ammunition and stores he could find cartage for.

As usual, 'twas arranged that the MacRosses of Gairloch should march with the Prince's column, whilst Sheila's clan was assigned to Lord George's division. The Master had been singularly quiet, of late, and indeed, was reinstated in the good graces of the Prince, for he contrived to make interest with Sir Thomas Sheridan; but there was always bad feeling betwixt the two septs, and the generals preferred to keep them separate.

We were at Montrose, three days after leaving Crieff, when a messenger from the Prince's column, riding loose hand and heel, caught up with us.

"Dispatches for Lord George Murray," he panted, as he reeled into headquarters. "Urgent! I am from his Royal Highness."

I ushered him in, then, at Lord George's suggestion, took him to the kitchen for refreshment. On my way back Lord George, himself, came to his door and called me.

"Gad, Chisholm, this is somewhat of concern to you!" he said soberly. "Gairloch has turned his coat."

"What, sir?"

"Yes, 'tis true. Gairloch and all his clan are gone over to the enemy. It seems he told some of the Camerons he met that he was through with the Prince. He says our cause is doomed."

A heavy sickness came over me.

"This will be the beginning of the end, will it not, sir?" I asked.

Lord George studied the papers on his desk.

"Nay, I would not say so," he denied, fighting to shake off the despondency that had gripped him, too. "If 'twere any one but Gairloch, I might——"

"But 'tis exactly the men like Gairloch that go first," I said. "They are like the rats the seamen tell of that quit a sinking ship."

"A cheerful soul, you are!" exclaimed Lord George, with a shudder. "Have done, man, with your baneful similes. 'Tis bad enough, as it stands, in all conscience. You must remember, though, that Gairloch was always no more than his father's mortgage on the possibility of Stuart success, and——"

"And now they are convinced there will be no Stuart success," I finished for him.

"God send you be wrong, lad," was all the answer he would make.

But I could see he felt as I did.

Ian Dhu and David took the news with surprising equanimity.

"Do ye tell me so?" was David's comment. "Aweel, himsel' waur oot for his ain 'vantage. Gif he wull hae reason tae ken mair siller awaits him otherwhaur, ye couldna howd him back."

Sheila saw it from a different angle.

"It is my mind they may start raiding to Slioch," she said with puckered brow. "That would be Gairloch's way. For he kens it would hurt me most. And I can not see my people burned and spoiled."

CHAPTER XIX

THE END OF THE GRAY FOX

MY FEARS were proved unfounded. The Master's treachery, instead of dispiriting the Prince's supporters, rather strengthened their allegiance to him. For they looked upon Gairloch's act as directly hostile to every chief who held loyal. The first effect of it was a considerable accession of numbers, many that had deserted before Stirling hastening to resume their places in the ranks at word of what had occurred. By the time the army was joined together again and the enemy forced out of Inverness, we were more than eight thousand strong, and the clans were hungry to attack the English.

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Behind us the Duke of Cumberland slowly was rallying his troops to follow into the dreaded fastnesses of the Highlands. The opportunities were all in our hands. It was an occasion for a dazzling succession of lightning blows, aiming always to catch the enemy off his guard.

Lord George comprehended the situation and its needs, but the Irish about the Prince, as usual, settled down to enjoy themselves and pretended to disdain harrying tactics as petty and undignified. There was naught to be done, they declared, until Cumberland came up with his army. Then we should fight him in the open field and beat him, as we had beaten other English armies.

"Gad's life, would you believe such incompetents could find a sovereign so credulous!" protested Lord George on returning from a council of war where these sentiments gained the Prince's favor. "Are we to let Cumberland wax and grow fat on our own country, the while he prepares his advance? Are we to give the English court the chance to say the rebels have sped their bolt? 'Tis beyond patience!"

Yet, thwarted as he was, he was able to achieve some small measure of his objectives. Lord Loudoun and the English forces in the far north were hunted down and destroyed. Fort Augustus was taken. Fort George fell when Inverness capitulated. The only English post remaining in the Highlands was Fort William, and this, too, must have succumbed to our arms had the French engineer officers known their work.

A series of raids through the Passes of Badenoch into Atholl kept the English outposts in a turmoil, and five thousand Hessian troops, besides numerous English regiments, were tied up in Perth and other towns. Had Lord George received the backing he asked for in these enterprises, he might have crippled the English so seriously they could not have taken the initiative against us that Spring. But there were always voices at the Prince's ear to whisper tales of dark suspicion, and Lord George was denied his most modest requests, checked in the high tide of his victories and recalled.

In these events I played small part, for Sheila's premonition of the Master's aims turned out correct. We had been less than two weeks at Inverness when a weary messenger staggered into the MacRoss camp with a call for help from Slioch.

"The Master is in the lower glens," he gasped. "Our people are fleeing to the castle and the hills."

Sheila had the clan under arms within the hour, and David and Ian Dhu were dispatched to Lord George to lay the situation before him. They met with ready sympathy. But his offers of assistance were declined.

"It wull be unco' kindly o' ye," said David, "but we hae a muckle to settle up wi' Gairloch. If ye hae no objection we wull do the warrk in our ain way."

"Don't you think," I suggested to Lord George, "that you should have a representative with the MacRosses?"

His ferocious face relaxed into a smile.

"A worthy idea," he applauded. "What say you, gentlemen?"

"If it be Chisholm, there wull be naught said," grunted Ian Dhu.

"Captain Chisholm it shall be, then," replied Lord George. "He holds a commission in your regiment, so I see not how you could refuse him his right to participate in the clan's vengeance."

To me he added privately:

" 'Tis a chance to drop back into the Middle Ages. I would I might go with you, lad. Knight-errantry, a lovely warrior-maid, a dastardly villain, two sets of rough fighters— 'Sblood, 'tis like to make my chilling blood quicken at the thought!"

Sheila greeted me with shy warmth, and gave me a place beside her at the short council of officers that decided our plan of campaign. 'Twas her suggestion we adopted.

"If the Master looks for us, 'twill be in our own country," she reasoned. "What we should be doing is to fall on his lands the while he will be gone, and then press on and attack him, as he forays Slioch unawares we are at his back."

We marched that afternoon, and we marched light and fast. Wherever a goat could find footing or the stag a place to climb, there the clansmen picked their path. If the way was shortest over the top of a mountain, they scaled its face. The most rugged defile never balked them. Tumultuous streams in narrow beds, we forded, man hanging to man, the pipers playing us in. Late at night we stopped and built fires to cook sparse meals of

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brochin—oatmeal mingled with water—and perhaps strips of venison roasted over the coals. With sunrise we were afoot again.

Three days of this brought us to the verge of Gairloch's country, a jumble of wild, snow-capped mountains and icy lochs. Not a sheiling nor a bothy was in sight. An empty bught, or sheep-pen, under the flank of the mountain we halted on, showed that men sometimes came hither. But for this I could have sworn we were beyond the habitated world's end.

That night and the next day we rested while the scouts stole forward into the glens. They returned with the news we sought. The villages below us were ripe for plucking. Most of the able-bodied men were gone raiding with the Master, but best of all, the "auld laird"—him men called the Gray Fox—was "by his lain" in Stroan Castle.

"Then to Stroan will we be going," decided Sheila.

"There wull be bonnie spoilings on the way yon," said David wistfully.

"Maybe so, but in the beginning we must come to Stroan without the Gray Fox kens we are about. With him in our hands we will be well able to bargain with the Master."

WE STARTED after dark, threading in and out of glens, past collections of huts, where dogs barked and the folk that came forth to peer at us fled with stifled shrieks when they saw the starshine on target boss and claymore hilt. But we never stayed to set a torch to the most tempting pile of thatch, and so an hour before the dawn we came in sight of the towers of Stroan, rising above the waters of a long inlet of the sea.

'Twas a place of fair size and strength for the Highlands, but no wise difficult to force when assaulted by surprise. The windows blinked dark and empty at us. From a couple of chimneys smoke-wreaths trickled lazily. If there were sentries they were asleep. Not a voice hailed us as we crossed a green open space and strung a circle around the unmoated walls.

The great nail-studded doors were shut, but Ian Dhu took short account of them. A score of gillies brought from the nearest farmyard a huge balk of timber and drove it thudding into the panels.

Shock! The doors quivered, sank inward and settled back upon their hinges. They were of good wood, well bolted.

Shock! This time the leaves were forced a hand's-breath apart—and they did not settle back.

Overhead a window rattled up. Voices shrilled. We could hear feet running back and forth within.

"Wha' comes below?" quavered a voice from the upraised window.

Shock! The battering-ram drove home a third time, and the solid doors leaned inward, staggering apart.

A new voice spoke.

"Stand aside, Andy," it ordered, in high, whining tones—a voice as cold as the dripping of an icicle. "Ye auld fule, gie me that blunderbuss! Now, then, whatever ye be wi'oot, answer or I'll fire. 'Tis Lord Gairloch speaks, and I gie ye fair warning I am sheriff depute for his Majesty in this shire and a justice o' the king's peace, and if any heather-beating, lousy-necked caterans think they can be playing the Pretender's game in these parts——"

Crash! The doors flew inward, and a wedge of clansmen tore the right leaf from the bolts.

"MacRoss!" they shouted. "Claymore!"

As they rushed the entrance, the blunderbuss roared overhead, but its load of slugs did no more than tear up the sods of the lawn.

We jammed through the shallow tunnel of the gateway into a courtyard, where half a dozen serving men cowered, fumbling uncertainly at fowling-pieces and claymores. The first clansmen came at them so furiously that they turned tail and ran—only to be overhauled and dragged down.

Opposite the gateway was the door of the great hall, and the clan swept in, splitting into innumerable parties that hunted joyfully along the rambling corridors from room to room, smashing furniture and mirrors, slashing at walls and tapestries, setting fire with their torches to curtains and bedgear.

Several times the hue and cry was punctuated by the crack of firelocks, but whenever I ran in the direction of the report it was to find some gillie had destroyed a shadow. David and I divided the castle betwixt us, but neither of us could find hide or hair of the Gray Fox.

At last, the fires the clansmen had set beginning to rage with real violence, we

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were driven down from the upper floors, and the smoke in the corridors ultimately became so thick that we cleared our men out of the house altogether, fearing lest they should shoot at each other.

One by one the different search-parties reported in the courtyard, where Sheila stood, guarded by dunniewassels and torch-bearers. The gillies had ransacked every corner of the building, and in proof of it produced an odd collection of servants and dependents, who were firmly convinced they were to be put to some horrible death. None of these persons would admit knowledge of Lord Gairloch. Andy, the steward, had seen him last when he fired the blunderbuss, and in the smoke of the discharge he had disappeared.

"Like the deil in a cloud o' brimstane reek," commented David grimly. "Aweel, it mull mak' nae differ where he micht be. He canna gang oot, and if he bides in he wull roast a bit befower he gangs hellward."

As if to prove David's words, a shout rose all around us; arms and torches pointed up at a window on the second floor. The smoke rolled in between, but I could discern an old man who leaned forward, half in supplication, half in fear. His face was in shadow, until a burst of flame stabbed the smoke—and then I thought I looked upon the Master, but the Master grown very old and gray in sin.

Whilst I looked, Lord Gairloch evidently came to a decision. He crawled through the window and over the ledge and hung for an instant at arm's length. He dropped.

It was a fall of twenty feet, but he landed at the bottom on all fours like a cat, and scrambled to his feet, tottery, yet alert. He drew a hand across his face.

"I am an old man," he said in fair English. "What do ye want wi' me?"

Two clansmen stepped up and took him by the arms. As they led him toward us I noted that one of his legs dragged strangely. 'Twas not lame, but as if it did not belong to him. He seemed in no pain.

"What do ye want wi', an old man?" he asked again in a querulous whine.

I saw now that he really did not look at all like the Master. The similarity was there, beyond doubt, but 'twas not contained in any identic molding of features. It must have been some innate spirit of depravity, some hidden power for evil that radiated from each.

He was very thin and tall, with hair that had once been red and was a rusty gray. His features were sharp and curiously vulpine. But it was his eyes that arrested attention. They were red, and they looked out at their surroundings exactly as do an animal's, shifty and sidewise, but burning like live coals when aroused to rage.

He was led over in front of Sheila, and the clansmen crowded close, for this was an historic moment for them—the humbling of an enemy who had threatened their house for generations.

"Who are ye?" he demanded in his quavering tones.

Sheila called out in the Gaelic for the torchmen to take the front rank, and a bright light was cast upon the center of the crowd.

"I am The MacRoss," she said.

"The MacRoss?" he snarled, his speech thickening. "Aweel, lassie, ye wull just cry sma'. I am Lord Gairloch. This is Stroan Castle—not Slioch. Cry sma'."

"And these," replied Sheila, waving her hand at the armed ranks on every side, "are the MacRosses of Slioch."

"Eh?" The Gray Fox looked startled. "What are ye doin' here, ye runagate caterans?"

"We are burning Stroan."

"Stroan canna be burnt."

"Look about you."

He gave an uneasy glance around.

"Aye, it was hot in yon," he conceded.

I began to understand that something was wrong with the man's head. Either in the fall or— But he was speaking again.

"What do ye want?"

"We have come to do justice to you, Gairloch," returned Sheila steadily.

"Justice for what?"

He put forward this question with an air of childish cunning.

"For the burned clachans in Glen Slioch that the Master will have left behind him."

"Aye, he's a hard man, the Master," assented Gairloch cannily. "But ye'll ken I am here. I hae no hand i' that business."

"I suppose you will be saying, too, you had no hand in my father's murder?" said Sheila, and a sigh swept the close-packed ranks of her clan. This was what they had been waiting for. This was the bringing to justice of the man they looked upon as their chief's assassin.

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"That wull hae been a lang time gone," answered Gairloch evasively.

"It is in my memory," said Sheila.

The Gray Fox cackled in reedy laughter.

"What a pother to be making over a man lang dead! Dinna ye hae his place?"

AT THIS David thrust himself out of the crowd, and flashed his dagger in Gairloch's face.

"Do ye think to daunder worrds wi' the chief o' Clan Ross?" he bellowed. "Ye murderrer—and worrse! These havers wull do ye nae guid, auld scoundrel. Gie us ceevil worrds or we wull hang ye frae the bawks o' your ain roof—if there be aught left o' it when the bonnie fire is burnt oot."

Gairloch started back, and a most remarkable thing happened. His leg that had dragged behind him seemed to regain life, a certain blur fell off his face and his red eyes shone with terrified understanding. The man was frightened back into his wits.

"Nae," he whined. "Nae, nae, I'm tellin' ye. I didna murder MacRoss. Oh, tak' awa' the steel! I didna murder him. I didna murder him, I tell ye! He willna let me be, but I didna murder him!" His voice rose to a shrill screech that cracked and broke. "It wasna me struck him. Nae it wasna me!"

He babbled something incoherent in the Gaelic, as his sanity lapsed, and once more David brandished the dagger before him.

"Wha' killed MacRoss?" demanded David.

The light of reason returned to Gairloch's eyes. He flinched from the steel.

"I dinna ken, I tell——"

David clutched him by the throat and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat—or as the hound throttles the fox.

"Ye lie, ye auld deil! Ye stabbed him yoursel'!"

"I didna, I didna!" Gairloch's voice was a wail. "I didna! It's a lie! Sawney stabbed him firrst! I didna, I tell ye! I didna!" Foam flecked his lips. "Forby the Master stabbed him in the hearrt to mak' sure o' the job."

"And where were ye?"

Gairloch's throat-muscles worked spasmodically.

"I—I—They just came and told me here. And I—" he laughed with awful reminiscent glee—"I said I wadna trust my ain son in a job like that, so I gaed oot wi' Sawney—Crooked Sawney, d'ye ken—and we——"

The MacRosses surged forward with a low growl of hatred, but Sheila leaped before him, arms outstretched.

"You will not be soiling your steel, my children," she cried. "It is mad he is."

But that ring of ferocious faces and hostile blades was too much for the trembling sanity of the Gray Fox. He shrieked aloud in the Gaelic, and with the saliva dripping over his lips, he suddenly shrank into a twisted, formless knot that writhed and was still.

Sheila turned white and a shudder wrenched her slight figure.

"Is he dead?" she whispered.

"Deid?" answered Ian Dhu, spurning the body with his foot. "Aye, himsel' wull be deid, but we wullna tak' chances the deil micht bring his ain back to the life."

And he summoned a couple of wide-eyed gillies, who made sure they had seen the vengeance of Heaven strike before them, and bade them place what was left of Gairloch on the smoking floor of his own hall.

"I wadna defile honest earth wi' that foul clay," said the old captain of Clan Ross with rare bitterness.

When the flames had wrapped themselves about the gray walls of Stroan, we resumed our march, but this time we spared nothing in our way. Houses, byres, crops, cattle, gear, all that could be found, we burned or carried off. The people only, Sheila insisted, should not be hurt.

It was our hope that we might be able to fall upon the Master before he heard of our arrival, but this was not to be. The first thing we learned when we gained the borders of Sheila's lands was that he had warning of our coming and was already embarked for the isle of Skye, where Lord Loudoun had taken refuge with the few loyalists of the north.

We caught several of his out-parties that had been tempted to linger by their greed for loot, but of him or his arch-fiend, Crooked Sawney, we saw no trace—save the poor corpses and the burned clachans and hocked cattle that dotted the country.

"It will be cruel warfare," said Sheila sorrowfully, "but it is our Highland way. If we do not burn and harry, they will think we fear their vengeance. Now we have burned two clachans to Gairloch's one, and the balance is in our favor. But at the

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least, we will not have been slaying in cold blood as he has done."

None of us could forget the hacked body of a young girl we had found in a village the Master's wolves had ravaged—for pure sport of killing, the survivors said. Blood to him was as wine to other men. He must drink it when the thirst came on him, and with each taste he craved more.

CHAPTER XX

THE CURSE OF SCOTLAND

WITH the best will in the world, Sheila could bring back no more than half her men to Inverness. The Winter was cold. Gairloch had destroyed many houses that must be rebuilt, if women and children were not to perish, and there was the constant menace of another raid from Stroan or Skye.

We found the army weakened and murmuring. Several of the clans were absent on expeditions like our own. Those that remained with the Prince were close to starvation, and no organized effort was being made to retard Cumberland's steady advance along the shore of the Moray Firth—for the English wisely anticipated the ambuscades that awaited them in the narrow Passes of Badenoch, and pitched on the safer and easier road by the sea.

Prince Charles and his advisers lived in a fool's paradise of their own devising. He spent his days hunting and fishing in the neighboring hills, his nights gaming and drinking and dancing. His treasure was exhausted, and the last consignment of French gold was wrecked in the country of that sept of the MacLeods that were friendly to the English. Such pay as the clansmen got was in oatmeal, and very little of that.

Verily, a madness seemed to have seized upon our people. The chiefs knew their danger, and they murmured now and then. But withal they joined the Prince in his dissipations, they gamed away the last of their meager guineas, they pretended to discount the slow progress of the English and boasted 'twould all end right when the Highland claymores had their chance to drink again of English blood.

So matters stood on the fifteenth of April, when our horse brought intelligence the English were at Nairn, a few hours' march distant, and the Prince perforce summoned a council to consider the situation. 'Twas a sobered assemblage gathered in the long dining-room of Culloden House about a table still littered with playing-cards and spotted with wine-lees.

Bear with me for a minute if I speak of these men, who were the counselors of a brave, unfortunate Prince. 'Twas the last time I saw them all together. Some there were who deserved greatness of Fate—surely, better ends than awaited them beyond the morrow's tragedy. Others merited the headsman's ax—and escaped. Some were wise and unselfish, some were weak and self-seeking, some were brave and blustery.

There was Murray of Broughton, with his long, white, cadaverous face and well-kept, twitching hands. There were stalwart chieftains like Lochiel, Lochgarry, John Roy Stuart, MacDonnell of Scothouse, Ian Dhu and MacLauchlan of that ilk. There were brave Lowland and Highland lords like Louis Gordon, the Duke of Perth, Lord Kilmarnock, Lord Elcho, and the venerable Lord Pitsligo. And there were the smug, sly faces of Mr. Quartermaster-General Sullivan and Sir Thomas Sheridan, who never let the Prince out of their sight, for fear some one might rout them from their control.

Prince Charles, himself, sat at the head of the table, pale and ill at ease, yet I am constrained to admit there was a certain nobleness about him, as of one who is ready for the issue, for better or for worse.

"We are met, my lords and gentlemen," he began, "that we may decide our policy in meeting the enemy. I await your advice."

"If it pleases your Royal Highness," spoke up Lord George from the far end of the table, "my recommendation is that we do not await the enemy."

"What, my lord?" exclaimed the Prince in surprise.

"No, sir. I would retire across the Water of Nairn into the hills of Badenoch. Let us fight him there, if he wishes. That is country for Highland warfare. Here—" he waved his hand toward the window—"we shall be at the mercy of the English horse and guns, and their foot can maneuver as they please to meet our charge."

There was a mutter of approval from the Highland chiefs. The Prince flushed with feeling.

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"It irks me to disagree with Lord George," he announced firmly, "but I find his suggestion unpleasant. We have retreated long enough. Let us stand and fight. Is not this our ground? Is not this the Highlands?"

"It is a level, marshy plain," returned Lord George patiently. "Moreover, sir, I would have you recall that our ranks are much depleted. Lord Cromarty is gone into the North with fifteen hundred men. MacDonald of Barisdale is absent. But half the Frasers are here. I might enumerate other clans. Add to all this, we are short of provisions, and our men are hungry."

"But would your step improve that last difficulty?" objected the Prince. "Certes, my lord, to retreat into the wild Highlands presents no seemly future for seven thousand men. Where would they get food?"

"So long as I have men with two legs and right arms for claymores, I will get them all the food they need," replied Lord George. "There are the Lowlands to ravage for meal. In the hills you will find cattle to supply meat for us for a year."

"Aye, but this would mean hardships, and there are some of us could not support hardships," declared the Prince, and I saw, from my post behind Lord George's chair, that he was deeply stirred. "My good friend Sheridan, here, could never withstand the fatigue, nor could Mr. Secretary Murray—and a dozen more I might mention."

"A most ill-advised plan," struck in Sheridan hastily. "'Twould be no less than an admission of defeat. We would have to abandon Inverness and all our stores."

Lord George laughed harshly.

"All our stores, say you?" he repeated. "Faith, Sir Thomas, and they do not suffice over-well at this present to keep the army fed and warm. What say you, Mr. Quartermaster-General?"

And he wheeled about on Sullivan, who glowered back at him.

"All is done that may be done," snapped the Irishman. "And 'tis as his Royal Highness says, to abandon Inverness would hurt our prestige, and we must lose all our artillery and our spare powder and lead."

"A pox upon our artillery!" Lord George's ugly face blazed with wrath. "What have our guns done yet for us? We have none to serve them properly. They could not even batter us a way into Fort William. I tell you, we are better off without them."

Murray of Broughton took up the argument in pompous, close-clipped tones. He ever fancied himself addressing a Parliament upon subjects of world import.

"Lord George, perhaps, has well stated the military advantages of a retreat," said he, "but we must not forget the political considerations of the moment. I am advised of many clans that are wavering on the question to come over to his Royal Highness's fortunes, and a retreat at this time would serve to alienate them forever. The Lowlands are smoldering——"

"Why did they not burst aflame, when we traversed them with a better army than we have now?" interrupted Lord George bluntly.

Broughton waved his hand—as though to waft a leaf from his vision.

"Tut, sir," he propounded, "the Lowlands are not the Highlands. You forget, my lord, you forget! Douce men of business, victualers, shipwrights, craftsmen, slaughterers, skinners and their like, have much at stake in a change of government. They distrusted us close to. We did not give them time to make up their minds ere we departed. Now, from a distance, and after a close view of the Duke of Cumberland, they see us differently. Much may be done in that quarter, depend upon it."

"I shall not dispute you farther, Mr. Secretary," answered Lord George drily. "But all this is beside the point of our discussion, which is what dispositions shall we make, with an English army, vastly superior in strength and resources, but a half-day's march distant?"

"Let us give battle to it," rejoined the Prince.

The response was prompt and hearty. Most of the men at that table, the brave and the worthy, as well as the despicable, could not forget that the pallid young man at the head of it was Charles Edward Stuart, Prince of Wales and Regent of Britain.

"If you will," consented Lord George, seeing he was hopelessly outvoted on this point; "but, your Royal Highness, I beseech you, let us retire across the Nairn and give battle in the broken ground on the west bank."

The Prince shook his head.

"That would be retreating, too," he said stubbornly. "No, I am resolved to fight the

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English as we have done before—as my ancestors fought them—on a fair field. And we shall beat them."

A faint color glowed in his cheeks.

"I bid you think, my lords and gentlemen!" he cried. "Have they ever failed to flee before our swords? The troops do not live that can resist the Highland charge!"

A clamor of approval in English and Gaelic answered him.

Lord George tried again.

"I have but one more suggestion to make," he said. "Will your Royal Highness consent to a night attack?"

Prince Charles pondered this.

"It sounds plausible," he conceded. "Outline your plan."

"The English are encamped at Nairn," replied Lord George rapidly. "Our scouts report they are celebrating and feasting—'tis the Duke of Cumberland's birthday. To-night they will sleep fast, beyond a doubt. We can march by the moors, avoiding the road, and fall upon them, front and rear, just before dawn. If the surprise is successful, I believe not one can escape."

This idea captured the fancy of the council even better than the Prince's. It smacked of true Highland tactics, the sudden attack, the overwhelming rush. The Prince, too, was favorably impressed.

"'Tis not a battle such as I desire," he said, "but 'twould be folly to allow sentiment to over-ride military policy. How say you sirs?"

There were no dissenting voices.

"So be it, then," declared the Prince. "We march to-night."

"Will your Royal Highness be pleased to draw up the order now?" asked Lord George.

Prince Charles nodded and looked around for a sheet of paper. Finding none, he picked a nine of diamonds from a pack of cards in front of him.

"I have drawn for luck," he exclaimed. "This will serve as well as anything."

And on that card—men call it "The Curse of Scotland"—he wrote the order for the attack.

Cannon were fired to notify foraging parties to return, and pipers were sent into Inverness to blow the clan rallies. But notwithstanding all precautions, 'twas exceeding difficult to collect the troops and acquaint the officers with the necessary dispositions, and the start was accompanied by much confusion.

THE night was pitch-dark, and although guides reputed to know the ground were assigned to each clan and regiment, everything seemed to go wrong. The column was slender and tenuous. The route led across bogs and plowed fields. The French and Irish troops, unused to mountain marching, brought up the rear, and their slowness reduced the speed of the entire body. Several times, too, the vanguard lost the way, and to our dismay the dawn was already whitening the eastern sky when we reached an eminence near the English camp. Instantly, there sounded the far-off rolling of alarm-drums, sure proof we had been discovered.

"Turn back," ordered Lord George briefly, and wearily the clansmen plodded once more over the way they had come.

Some distance in the rear we met the Prince, tight-lipped and stern.

"What means this movement?" he demanded.

"Failure, sir," said Lord George coldly.

"Why?"

"'Twas to have been a night attack, your Royal Highness will recall. The dawn is at hand. The enemy were apprized of our approach."

For the first time, I think, Prince Charles realized the seriousness of his position.

"But—but—" he stammered.

"The column was insufferably slow," answered Lord George. "We of the van might have been in time, but we had to wait always for the rear to catch up."

The Prince turned in his saddle, so that we might not see his working face.

"You acted for the best, my lord," he said very quietly. "Well, we must retreat and prepare for whatever may happen. I make no doubt we shall meet the enemy later, and give a good account of ourselves."

Oh, the bitter sorrow of that forlorn march, with a storm of rain and hail pelting our backs, a vigilant enemy behind us and only hunger ahead!

On Culloden Moor the clans were halted and bidden to get what rest they could on the bare ground, whilst the Prince and his officers rode to Culloden House to breakfast on bread and whisky and talk over what might next be done. Again Lord George pressed his advice to retreat across the Nairn, but the Prince resisted it as obstinately as before.

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"This ground suits me," he asserted. "'Tis a fair, open field, and we have the Firth on one flank and the Water of Nairn on the other."

"Our lines can not be long enough to reach clear from water to water," Lord George reminded him.

"No matter. We shall hold our front. Now, sirs, let us sleep, if we may."

Our sleep ended at seven o'clock, ere it had been begun, in most cases. Patrols of Lord Elcho's squadron of horse galloped in with the news that Cumberland's advance guard was but two miles distant. He had quitted his camp so soon as he had determined the retreat of our army from its abortive night attack.

The trumpets of the horse sounded a brazen call to arms. The pipes of the Highlanders skirled through the streets of Inverness. But 'twas no easy task to reorganize that tired, scattered army. Disheartened by the fatigue they had been put to and their ill-fed condition, several thousand men had rebelled against sleeping on the wet heather of the Moor, and marched off to seek shelter among near-by farms. These fellows were in no mood for fighting. They were beaten already. They wanted to flee, sought only a good excuse for throwing away their firelocks and running home to their villages.

Gradually, by the utmost efforts, the officers mustered some five thousand dispirited men. Few of them had eaten that morning. All were soaked to the skin. But the chiefs harangued them, and the fierce challenge of the pibroch stirred their blood. And presently, the prospect of battle aroused them from their lethargy. Fighting was better than hunger and uncertainty.

The order of battle was hastily drawn up and I was sent to execute it. As I scanned the list of clans, I hesitated, then rode back to Lord George.

"Your pardon, sir," I said, "but there is a mistake. You have given the Atholl men the right of the line."

The right of the line from time immemorial in Scottish annals, was claimed by the MacDonalds, and they had held it at Prestonpans and Falkirk. But Lord George cast a ferocious scowl upon me.

"'Sdeath, Captain Chisholm," he swore. "Have you to learn that unquestioning obedience is the soldier's first duty?"

I saluted and started to ride away, but he recalled me.

"Stay," he said, and took the list from my hand, thumbing it over. "Nay," he added finally, "let it go. I am leading the right, and I choose to lead my own clan. At Falkirk the MacDonalds got out of hand, and I could not check them."

A circumstance seemingly trivial, but 'twas of vast importance that bloody day.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BREAKING OF THE CLANS

"OH, FRANK! Frank!"

The words reached me faintly as I bent low in the saddle before the lashing hail-stones. With some difficulty I discerned a kilted figure that waved to me from the enclosure of the farm of Baluraid by the Water of Nairn, and I turned Black Betty's nose in that direction. 'Twas Sheila, and she ran to meet me, recking nought of the storm.

"I hear the English will be coming!" she cried.

"They are, and I have orders for the clan to take station in the center of the first line."

"That will be good hearing!" Her eyes danced, then grew serious. "But you must come within. Ian Dhu has had the sight, and he was asking for you."

I was half-inclined to smile, but she was in deadly earnest.

"He started up before we had news of the coming of the English," she went on, "and he called out that he could hear the tramp of the redcoats and the rumble of their cannon. Then he groaned and covered his face, and when we asked him what he saw, he said he would tell it to none but you. I have sent gillies everywhere in search of you."

I knew 'twould offend her to mock at her foster-father's vision, so I answered gravely—

"It must be good news, if it comes before battle."

"That would not be Ian Dhu's manner," she returned, with a decided shake of the head.

The moisture streamed off her bonnet and shone on the rebellious strands of her blue-black hair. Her plaid was soaked. Her kilt hung limp to her bare brown

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knees. The water squelched in her brogues. But her straight, lithe figure was as sinewy and wholesome as a boy's. She splashed along beside my horse as if she enjoyed it.

"Do you not grow weary of this hard life?" I asked abruptly.

"I?" Her gray eyes looked up at me, wide with surprise. "Oh, no. I love the mountains and the rain. And where would I be, if not with the clan?"

"At Slioch, with a roof over your head and maiden's clothing on your back."

Her eyes twinkled.

"I will not be sure I should know how to conduct in a vast hoop-skirt and stomacher." She gave a little skip in the mud. "I will be more pleasured with the kilts. Tell me, Frank, why do the Lowland girls have to cover up their legs?"

I blushed.

"'Tis a matter I know nothing of," I muttered.

"And you would advise me concerning it?"

"Well, at the least, I have your good at heart, Sheila."

She patted my knee, quaintly appreciative.

"So you have, and it is I would be an ungrateful girl not to say so; but oh, Frank, will you not have an interest in my comfort? 'Tis much more agreeable to be marching with the clan than housekeeping in a dingy, damp old house and seeing the slattern maids tend their spinning."

"Like enough," I admitted. "But have you not thought, Sheila, that some day there must come an end to this?"

"An end?"

Now her eyes were near black with fright.

"Yes. Some day there will be an end to marching and fighting."

"You mean?"

"The Prince will have won his throne, or——"

"Do not be letting it pass your lips," she cut me off quickly. "It will not be right to think such thoughts. And that is a stream we will cross when we come to it."

We said nothing more until I had swung down from Black Betty in the farmyard, and handed over the reins to one of the gillies in attendance.

"You will be finding Ian Dhu in the kitchen beyond," she indicated. "And—and—Frank, you—you will not be thinking me an unmannerly, forward hizzie because I wear the kilts and like to be about with men? You will not be disliking me, if I do not go to Slioch?"

"Dislike you?" I exclaimed. "Why, Sheila, I—I—"

Here I caught a grip on myself and strangled silent.

"What?" she queried eagerly. "Tell me what you would have said, Frank?"

"'Tis nothing," I mumbled. "No matter."

She drew back from me.

"Then you will be angered with me?"

"Angry? No! I—I— Can't you see, Sheila, that you may twist me about your little finger? I would not stand in your way, if you wanted all Scotland."

"Why," she said, laughing, "you will be just like David and Ian Dhu and everybody else." She pondered a moment. "But no, you are not. You must be different. I feel differently about you, Frank. I don't know what it is, but it is quite different."

"Did you not say Ian Dhu was awaiting me?" I inquired hastily, and made my escape. At that minute I would rather have charged the English army single-handed than have been compelled to withstand another assault of her child-like candor.

Ian Dhu was staring into the fire that burned on the kitchen hearth, but he roused himself as I entered. One look was sufficient to warn me the man was honestly convinced of the verity of what he had seen—or dreaded.

"Laddie," he began, his grim old face gray and drawn, "Ian Dhu wull hae dreed his weird."

"What talk is this for the eve of battle?" I returned, startled, despite myself, but seeking to hearten him.

"Nae, nae," he replied, shaking his head. "Ye maun ken Ian Dhu dinna fears death. 'Tis hersel'—" he nodded toward the farmyard, where Sheila stood, surrounded by a group of her gentlemen—"I wull be fleyted aboot."

And he made a gesture dismissing himself from the conversation.

"But how can you talk like this?" I objected. "You will be here when many others——"

"Mon," he interrupted, "I hae seed masel' wi' the bowels ripped out o' me under the English guns. Ian Dhu is fey. Hae done wi' it."

He paused, and his eyes seemed to stare

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through the wall they were focused upon.

"Whiles the sicht cam' ower me the morrn," he continued finally, "I seed yoursel'. There was a bloody rout on the moor yon, wi' tartans breaking richt and left, and the dragoons riding wi' red swords, and the English guns blattering death. But ye wullna speak aught o' this."

His fierce eyes bored my soul.

"Ye wull speak naught to ain mon," he repeated.

I bowed mutely. To my own surprise, I was beginning to believe this nonsense.

"In the middle o' all the hurrly-burrly I seed yoursel' wi' the bit lassie, and ye were by your lain, for the clan was broken." His voice shook with emotion. "The Clan Ross was broken!"

"But if you believe this will happen, should you not go to the Prince?"

"Nae," he said calmly. "Wha' wull be, wull be. If I hae seed it, it wull come to pass. For yoursel', I hae called ye here to bid ye keep watch ower the Chief. Forby ye are an Englishmon, ye will be a mon o' honor, Chisholm. I think well o' ye. Do ye richt by the lassie, and—"

He hesitated, and the peculiar cloudy film I had noticed once before veiled his eyes.

"Nae, I wullna tell ye," he decided. "But it is in ma mind, ye wull hae rewarrd for the guid ye do."

Against all reason I found myself believing what he said. A lump choked my throat.

"And yourself? Can I do aught for you?"

"Naught but to care for the Chief."

He held out his great bear's-paw of a hand, and the tears sprang into my eyes at his grip—but, no, 'twas not altogether the grip.

"A lang life to ye, Chisholm," he said, and with a smile he added: "and a muckle brood o' braw bairns."

Before I could answer him, the pipers on the moor began to play the clan rally as a signal that the enemy were in sight.

"Ye wull ken all in a few hours' time," remarked Ian Dhu kindly. "Guid-by, laddie."

THE OPENED the door, and we were at once surrounded by a company of officers demanding final instructions. I left him, placidly dissolving the confusion, and leaped to Black Betty's saddle. For the nonce I wished only to go somewhere—anywhere, so long as I might be moving, and so dispel the cloak of melancholy he had thrown around me.

But as the clans formed their array, my spirits rose and I forgot Ian Dhu's terrible forecast. That solid line of tartan and steel that barred the moor—Atholl men, on the right, then Camerons, Appin Stewarts, Frasers, Mackintoshes, Farquharsons, MacLeods, MacRosses, MacLeans, Clanranald, MacDonalds of Keppoch, MacDonalds of Glengarry and the Duke of Perth's regiment, and behind them, in the second line, the Ogilvies, the Gordons, the French and Irish pickets and the horse.

Surely, these veteran warriors could not easily be driven from their ground. Outnumbered they were—yes; but how often in the past the Highlanders had proved their reckless valor could discount numbers, discipline and equipment.

Wildly the pipes skirled in the hail and mist. They flung the taunting strains of "The King Shall Enjoy His Own Again" in the very face of the English army. The war-cries of the clans rose above the clamor of the music. As I rode along the line from right to left, giving the orders for the advance to the chiefs, I began to believe that after all, we should conquer; that Ian Dhu must have been suffering from delusions caused by an underfed stomach.

Chief after chief met me with flashing eye, clan after clan shouted back its promise of victory—until I reached the far left that was held by the three MacDonald regiments. They stood moodily in their ranks. Their pipes were silent. They watched the enemy's preparations with sullen indifference.

"Advance?" sneered the first officer I spoke to. "For why should we advance? This is na our ain place."

His comrades echoed him. I sought out MacDonald of Keppoch, the principal chief of the sept, and even he frowned upon me.

"I will do what I may," he said, "but you can say to Lord George Murray from me that there is not a man of the name MacDonald does not consider he has been given mortal insult, and if we come out of this affair alive some one will pay for it."

"Of that, sir, I cannot speak," I replied; "but I am told to instruct you that when the right advances all the remainder of the line is to come on with it."

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"I will do what I may," reiterated Keppoch, "but I tell you plainly my men have not their hearts in it."

The English opened the action with a devastating fire from their artillery, which was ably served. The round shot cut gaps in the loose ranks of the clans, and the men on the right, who suffered most, swayed uneasily. The Mackintoshes had never been in action before, and they ran forward first, followed by the center. Lord George's Atholl men went ahead smartly until they came opposite some walled enclosures near the bank of the Nairn, whence a flanking fire was poured into them, and they faced around and devoted all their attention to replying to it.

The Camerons, the Appin Stewarts, the MacRosses, the MacLeods and the MacLeans charged with their usual whirlwind intensity. They came up to musket-range, fired a volley, and then dashed forward through the smoke of their discharge, yelling "Claymore!" They broke Munro's regiment, flanked Barrell's, drove both back, captured some guns and took a flag. 'Twas just as they closed that Lord George pulled me from the mêlée. His ugly face was blackened with powder-smoke and rain, and convulsed with passion.

" 'Fore God, Chisholm, the battle hangs by a hair!" he shouted. "We are held on the far right; the Atholl men can not go forward. Now, there is a check on the left. Do you ride and see what is wrong. The whole line must go forward or we are lost."

I spurred Black Betty as she had never been spurred before, and bravely she responded. Emerging from the smoke clouds that enshrouded the center, I saw the MacDonalds standing sullenly inert, although the English grapeshot was smashing their files.

"What is wrong?" I asked, galloping up to Keppoch.

His face was flushed crimson.

"They say they have no business in this fight," he answered brokenly. "They say their place is on the right, where their fathers always fought. They will not go on."

The Duke of Perth, who had halted his regiment for lack of the MacDonalds' support, rode over and tried to prod them into action.

"Come!" he called. "We will make the right the left this day!"

They glowered at him.

"I will make you an offer," he said, trying again. "Follow me, and I will change my name to MacDonald—and proud I shall be of it! Claymore!"

He won a few to him by these quips, for he was one of the best-loved noblemen in the army, but the majority hung back.

Whilst the Duke argued and pleaded, Keppoch dug the earth with his claymore point and cursed softly to himself. Suddenly, he ran forward. At a little distance he halted, and waved his sword. But the angry MacDonalds still hesitated.

"*Mo Dhia, an do thrieg Clann mo chinnidh mi?*" he cried out in the Gaelic—which is to say: "My God, have the clansmen of my name forsaken me?"

This taunt was too much for the MacDonalds. With a roar of restrained fury, they swept forward; but before they caught up with him their brave chief had fallen, and their fury seemed to change to despair. Twice their officers led them down upon the enemy, and each time they circled and retired when the English foot refused to fire at long range. 'Twas evident to me the only way to get them to the sword's-point was to arouse their pride. Lord George, who was responsible for this mischance, was the one man who could rectify it.

But Lord George had disappeared. I rode Black Betty into the heart of the carnage, up to the English bayonets that bristled unbroken, save where the clans were hacking a path through Barrell's and Munro's regiments. Nowhere could I find my general. From wounded men I learned that he was dead, that he had ridden off to bring up the Prince and the reserves, that he was "in the hell-reek yon."

The last of these rumormongers was a MacRoss, and in desperation I asked him where were the clan. He motioned vaguely behind him to the shapeless pall of smoke and mist that was shot with flame and raucous with the bedlam of battle.

So Black Betty and I pushed on, she picking her way daintily amongst the bodies that lay in windrows, tartan and redcoat heaped together at the points of shock. Everything was fogged and uncertain, but presently we stumbled upon a company of kilted ghosts, who swarmed about us, claymores threatening.

" 'Tis Captain Chisholm of the Clan Ross," I cried.

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"Yoursel' wull be in grand company, then," laughed a giant dunniewassel. "This is the Clan Ross."

"Where is the Chief?"

"In the front wi' Ian Dhu."

One of the men who had halted me was Evan, my seryant, and I charged him to hold Black Betty, whilst I went forward. 'Twas the last ever I saw of either of them.

The clan was formed in the favorite battle order of the Highlanders, wedge-shaped, with the strongest dunniewassels and tacksmen at the point of the wedge. I found Sheila in the center, bulwarked as usual by a group of picked fighting-men. She met me with a cool smile.

"We will be having a splendid fight," she shouted to make herself heard above the din. "It is proud of the clan I am this day. See, the English are flying all around us."

I could not find it in my heart to tell her what had happened elsewhere in the field, so I gave her a friendly word, and passed on to Ian Dhu's side.

He was a fearsome object, for he had held the point of the wedge since the advance began. His claymore dripped blood. There was gore even on the spiked boss of his target. His fierce old eyes had the brooding look of an eagle, and there was an aloofness in his manner that was uncanny. A god of battle was Ian Dhu, as he towered in the clinging mist.

He heard my brief narrative without question.

"We maun just fecht on," he said when I had ended. "The English wull be beat here."

"Can you take those to the left of us in the rear?" I suggested.

"We wull hae a try at it." His gaze wandered over the devil's brew that shut us in. "But do ye keep an eye on the chief. Mind wha' I tellet ye, Chisholm."

Next minute he was back in his place at the tip of the wedge and I was making my way to Sheila's position, when there came a racket of cannon close by and the grapeshot tore our formation to pieces.

My first thought was of Sheila, but ere I could look for her several men cried:

"The captain is down!"

I retraced my steps. Ian Dhu was lying, as he had told me he would lie, under the English guns. David was bent over him, trying to stanch his terrible wounds, but 'twas hopeless. Yet he had strength enough to motion us away.

"Sheila," he said distinctly.

She came running as he spoke, and his eyes brightened at sight of her.

"Hecht, lassie," he said tenderly.

"Foster-father!" she sobbed, flinging herself beside him. "Oh, foster-father, you will not be leaving your Sheila? You will not be leaving me?"

His dour features softened, and he raised one of his huge hands, curiously aimless and wandering, and fondled her cheek.

"Nae, nae, lassie," he assured her in a hoarse whisper. "A' wull be richt. I hae seed it——"

A new expression transformed his face. His eyes stared, the sweat burst out upon his forehead. His breath came in thick, laboring gusts.

"The English—" he gasped.

Then, dying as he moved, in some marvelous manner he lurched onto his feet and stood erect again at the point of the wedge.

"Claymore!" he roared, waving his red blade on high.

And he crashed to the ground, as the spent pine crashes down the mountain-side, with his face to the enemy.

Sheila stooped and kissed him, wiping his brow with a kerchief she took from her sporran. David touched her shoulder.

"We canna be stoppin' lang," he said awkwardly. "Himsel' wadna be wishfu' for it."

"Aye," she agreed, and rose, dry-eyed once more, "but maybe——"

The rest of what she would have said was drowned in a thundering roll of musketry on our right. Simultaneously voices screamed through the mist in English and Gaelic. A second volley thundered closer at hand.

"The English wull hae flanked us," shouted David.

The turmoil became indescribable. At regular intervals the volleys exploded on our right, and our men began to fall. The Camerons, who had been fighting on our left, drove past toward the rear. Without any warning the cry went up:

"Save yourselves! All is lost!"

The battle-mist was rent apart, and we saw Wolfe's regiment advancing scarce a hundred yards away, the sergeants with their halberds regulating the ranks as if on parade. We could even hear the officers talking to the men and giving their orders.

"Steady, my bullies! Time for every brave grenadier to kill his rebel! Dress

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your ranks, right company! Remember Flanders! Ready! Present! Fire!"

In the ticking of a second the Clan Ross was a mob of desperate men, fleeing across Culloden Moor, dissolving gradually into a great mob of fugitives that had been the army of Prince Charles.

CHAPTER XXII

DESPAIR

THE remnants of the right wing and center made off to the westward along the road that follows the north bank of the Water of Nairn. We ran with them, David on one side of Sheila, I on the other. A little group of dunniewassels and stout-hearted gillies guarded her from the rear.

"But we will be running away!" she protested, hysterically. "Oh, David, Frank! Do not be letting them run away! We must stand to it! What would Ian Dhu say?"

"He wad say gar run till ye drop," returned David shortly. "Gie a look to the field aboot ye."

As far as we could see, Culloden Moor was dotted with fugitives in tartan, and among them, as Ian Dhu had foretold, the dragoons rode with bloodied sabers, the Campbell and Lowland militia harrying on the rout.

Sheila was only partly convinced.

"Where will be the Prince, then?" she cried. "Surely, there is something we can do!"

I pointed far ahead to the crest of a hillock over which streamed a party of mounted men, galloping furiously. The flapping standards they bore proclaimed them the Life Guards, who always attended the person of Prince Charles.

"There rides the Prince," I told her. "You may see he has abandoned hope of staying the English here."

But she still refused to believe the inevitable.

"Oh, Frank, you will be doing something," she pleaded insistently. "You must! We cannot be beat! Think what it will mean to his Royal Highness—to all of us. It will be plain ruin, I tell you."

"His Royal Highness has taken the bit in his teeth," I answered grimly. At that moment I was not in the mood to be fair to my sovereign, I am shamed to admit.

"'Tis too late to save him, when he leads us all in flight. But, indeed, he could not change matters, if he would, Sheila. I knew when I joined you the battle was lost. The MacDonalds would not charge, and the whole left wing was held up."

"A black shame on them!" she exclaimed passionately. "May their children curse the mention of their names! It will not be themselves alone they have betrayed this day, but all Scotland!"

"Nay, the fault is Lord George's in part."

"I care not whose the fault! It would be better to stand and die than run like this. Would you leave Ian Dhu back there to front the English by himself?"

David winced at this savage thrust.

"Himsel' wad hae nae other thocht but to save the Chief," he said with simple dignity.

"We are doing exactly what he wished—what he bade me to do," I hastened to add. "He saw this very thing fall out this morning, Sheila, and his one thought was that you should escape the field."

"He had the sight of this?" she asked, greatly startled. "Then he was fey!"

She muttered something to David in the Gaelic, and they both crossed themselves.

"He tellet ye wha' the sight showed to him?" questioned David diffidently.

"Yes."

He stared at me with a strange mingling of puzzlement and respect.

"Aweel," he commented, "it becomes us to do his bidding, Sheila."

"I will be doing so," she agreed in a very subdued voice.

And that was the last trouble we had out of her. Neither she nor David disputed my suggestions again, for they looked upon me with almost superstitious awe as the mouthpiece of the dead.

On the hill-top where we had seen the Prince's cavalcade we halted a moment to take a final view of the battle-field. The English foot remained in their ranks, advancing slowly and in regular order, ready to repel any surprise attack. But the horse and the militia were pounding the wreck of the clans on the road to Inverness.

Even at that distance we could see the parties of militia going over the field and methodically blowing out the brains of the wounded—the foul climax of a splendid victory, a deed which earned for Cumberland, along with the subsidies, rank and perquisites awarded him by an obsequious

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Parliament, the life-long epithet of "Butcher."

We who had chosen the road beside Nairn Water were practically unmolested, perhaps because there were so many of us and some opposition was offered to the first attempts at pursuit. We marched rapidly, however, for we were beaten men, and we could not know how soon the whole English army might be at our heels.

'Twas early afternoon when we reached Felie, a village some four miles from Inverness and on the opposite bank of the Nairn. Before the miserable inn was planted the royal standard, as a sign that Prince Charles had set up his headquarters within.

WHAT a picture of dejection met our eyes when we had passed the guard at the hovel's entrance! About a bare table sat the Prince, the officers of his personal staff, mostly Irish, and some few others, like ourselves, fugitives, separated from their clans, hungry, tired and empty of pocket.

Prince Charles greeted us kindly. He was very nervous, and there were deep purple hollows under his eyes; but he tried to assume his usual debonair manner and with his own hand he placed a seat for Sheila by his side and gave her of his meager portion of bread and whisky.

"If all had fought as did the MacRosses we should not be here," he said with a crooked smile.

"You say truth, your Royal Highness," Sheila stated proudly. "The children of my clan died behind the English line, and my—" her eyes grew misty with unshed tears—"my foster-father lies there at the head of those brave ones who broke the Redcoats."

"My heart goes out to you, Mistress Sheila," answered the Prince very gently. "Indeed, there have been many brave gentlemen and gallant fellows lost this day." his voice quivered. "Oh, 'tis branded on my soul!" he cried. "What a price to pay! My God, what a price to pay! Poor, brave Scotland!"

"Alas, that such an end should come to so fine a venture," echoed Sir Thomas Sheridan in haggard tones.

"This will not be the end, Sir Thomas," replied Sheila.

"*Ma foi!*" he fluttered. "What's this you say, Miss MacRoss?"

"I say it will not be the end," she declared stanchly. "There are thousands ready to swing their claymores again for Prince Charles."

The Prince's face brightened at this, but Sir Thomas pulled a long countenance, and his boon-ally, Mr. Quartermaster-General Sullivan, struck in —

"Sure, Miss MacRoss, will you have the kindness to show us where we may get this army you speak of?"

"In the road outside," flashed Sheila so quickly he was at a loss to answer, and the table chuckled, the Prince not least of all.

"This is fine hearing," he exclaimed, a touch of color kindling in his wan cheeks. "It went sore against my pride to quit the moor this morning without striking a blow with my own right arm, but my advisers would not permit it, and a prince, at best, is a slave of his people. I should welcome another chance to strike that blow."

The Scotsmen around the table responded heartily to this.

"We will stand by your Royal Highness," they assured him. "The clans will rally. The White Cockade is not torn down."

"Valiant counsel," sneered Sir Thomas Sheridan. "But words, my lords and gentlemen, are not strong arms. Show us what else we have to expect save a beaten army to support our Prince."

Now, my duties as aide-de-camp to Lord George had made me familiar with the situation and the muster-rolls, and this opportunity to humble Sheridan was too good to be passed by—wholly aside from the consideration that a blow struck against him was a blow for the cause that Sheila had pleaded so well.

"Touching Sir Thomas's suggestion, have I your Royal Highness's leave to speak?" I demanded, striding forward.

Prince Charles nodded.

"I was in every part of the field this morning," I said, addressing myself to Sheridan direct and making my tone as cutting as might be. "I doubt if a thousand men were lost all told—although God knows that is loss enough. We were five thousand when the line was formed. That will leave four thousand that escaped, less the French pickets that retreated toward Inverness and must capitulate on what terms they can make. But there were a good two thousand men quit the ranks last night and went off in search of food.

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"They were not in the battle, and if you send messengers to the several roads all of them may be headed, together with the fugitives from the field, and dispatched to a common rendezvous. Nor is this all, your Royal Highness. The Master of Lovat, MacPherson of Cluny, MacDonald of Barisdale and Glengyle, with the MacGregors, are on their way to join us with two thousand fresh men. If your Royal Highness will but say the word you may be at the head of eight thousand men in a week's time."

'Twas curious to note the reception I met. The Scots applauded; the Prince's Irish officers shook their heads. But I had touched that vein of romance in Prince Charles's character that was the mainspring of his noblest actions.

"Captain Chisholm, you have done well," he cried. "'Sblood, I was near to forgetting that this is the first battle we have lost yet! We have had two days of them, and we shall have another. What say you, Sir Thomas?"

Sir Thomas arched his eyebrows and contemplated the carefully joined tips of his fingers.

"I would have your Royal Highness recall that there is a price on your head," he said softly. "To be exact, that the person delivering up Charles Edward Stuart, dead or alive, to the representatives of the Hanoverian, is promised the sum of thirty thousand pounds sterling and full pardon for all acts done or committed."

A shadow settled like a gray cloud upon the Prince's face.

"Well, what of it?" he asked bruskly.

"'Tis a temptation, a vast temptation," returned Sir Thomas, shrugging his shoulders. "A fortune for any man, be he ever so rich. In times like these, your Royal Highness, allegiance wavers. The weak and the culpable are always with us. For instance, there was Gairloch."

"Gadslife, what are you driving at?" snapped the Prince.

Having skilfully laid the foundation for his last move, Sir Thomas played it.

"It is my view, sir, you would be safest with a few chosen companions in some vicinity close to the sea, whence you might readily escape to France, should it become necessary."

Sheila, who had stayed quiet whilst we were talking, boiled over at this.

"You are a wicked old man," she asserted vigorously. "Such words will be bad hearing in Scots ears, when our hearts have no feeling at all but love for our Prince! Oh, your Royal Highness, do not be letting what he says turn your trust away from us. Do you but confide in us, and we will protect you and place your father on his throne."

Sheridan gave her a look of rage that was comic, but the Prince received her tirade in good part. In fact, it amused him no little, for, despite his tendency to lean on his old tutor's opinions, he fully appreciated Sir Thomas's pomposity and liked to see his pride-bubble pricked.

"Now, do you see what you have brought down upon your head?" he derided him.

Sheridan spluttered something concerning council-tables and nurseries which brought every Scotsman in the room to his feet. I am thankful to say I was a matter of three seconds ahead of the first.

"It is true that you are old enough to be my father," I said with a low bow, "but I will be pleased to fight your representative with any weapon he may choose. I may say, sir, that I do not consider you a gentleman."

Sir Thomas cleared his throat and blustered, but the Prince interfered.

"This difficulty is ended," he said with one of his rare exhibitions of authority, "Sir Thomas, you were not over-courteous to Mistress MacRoss, who is one of my most trusted supporters.

"Captain Chisholm, it must be apparent to you that a loyal gentleman does not broach a quarrel in the presence of even an outlawed Prince. Mistress Sheila—" his voice softened—"I would not chide you severely if I could, but Sir Thomas was the tutor of my youth, and I know him, I dare swear, better than you, and I assure you he is not 'a wicked old man.'"

"Maybe so," returned Sheila, who was the only one of us dared answer the royal rebuke, "but he speaks of what he does not ken when he hints your Royal Highness would not be safe in our company."

"'Tis not your company he has in mind, mistress," replied the Prince sadly, "nor any valiant gentleman's here. But I am sure some of you would be shocked did you know the snares that surround your Prince."

David broke the ensuing silence.

"Ye wullna gie us the go-by, your Royal Highness?" he asked gruffly.

"Desert you? Never!" protestingly.

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"Then come with us," begged Sheila. "We will guard you. We will answer with our lives for yours." To which I urged:—

"If you leave us now, Scotland is lost."

He hesitated, and other gentlemen at the table spoke up, promising him support and deathless allegiance. But he still wavered betwixt the two parties.

"I scarce know what to do," he said unhappily. He turned to me.

"Know you where Lord George Murray is gone?" he inquired.

"I have not seen him since he ordered the advance this morning."

An officer present volunteered that he had passed Lord George unhorsed and retreating from the field with the remnants of the Atholl men.

"I should like to have his counsel," murmured the Prince. Sir Thomas leaned over and whispered in his ear.

"What?" exclaimed the Prince angrily.

"Yes, sir, 'tis true, I am assured," declared Sheridan.

"But 'tis impossible to believe," objected the Prince. "Why, he——"

"This place is over-public for details," suggested Sir Thomas, raising his eyebrows in my direction.

Prince Charles pushed back his chair and led the way to a far corner of the room, where he conferred privily with Sheridan, Sullivan and a third officer, named O'Neal, whom he summoned to his side.

The rest of us waited around the table, the Scotsmen ill-suppressing their rage at this open favor shown to the Irish officers and the evident intent to poison the Prince's mind with suspicion of their loyalty. What was said to the Prince I never heard, but 'tis certain beyond dispute that the doom of Scotland and the Stuart cause was sealed in that whispered argument.

"It is my duty to your royal father to warn you again, sir, that thirty thousand pounds is a great inducement, even to the loyal," pressed Sir Thomas aloud.

That gray look once more clouded the Prince's face.

"Very well, then," he decided. "You shall have your way. But if we go, we had best go quickly."

"Go where, your Royal Highness?" asked Sheila. But he ignored her.

"Captain Chisholm," he said, "as Lord George's representative here, I charge you to seek out him and such other leaders as remain and bid them gather their forces at Ruthven in Badenoch. They are to await there further word from me." I saluted.

"And your Royal Highness will be where?" I ventured to question.

"I shall ride to the western Highlands with a small company of gentlemen," he replied evasively.

"But——"

"I can not answer you more definitely, Captain Chisholm. You will do as I say."

He bowed to the company.

"Mistress Sheila, to our next meeting. My lords and gentlemen, fare you well! You shall hear from me at Ruthven."

IN FIVE minutes he was riding at breakneck speed toward Loch Ness, his only companions Sullivan, Sheridan, O'Neal, Allan MacDonald, a priest; Ned Burke, an Irish servant—whose knowledge of the Highlands and all-around handiness commended him to the Prince; Sir David Murray, Alexander MacLeod of Muiravonside; John Hay, his assistant secretary; and two gillies.

After the Prince had gone, Lord Elcho came up to me and asked for orders for the Life Guards.

"I am told his Royal Highness left instructions with you," he said. "Where am I to take my squadron?"

"The Prince has appointed a rendezvous at Ruthven in Badenoch," I answered. "That is all I know."

"'Tis all we need to know," returned Lord Elcho bitterly. "The young springald is off to save his own neck and we may go hang for what he cares. I'll take my oath Sheridan has been telling him again George Murray plans to sell him to Cumberland."

A hard judgment, in sooth, but what could we think, when four days later the gathering clans at Ruthven received this curt message from Prince Charles:

The rising is over. Let every man seek his safety in the best way he can.

Men whose families had served the Stuarts since Walter the Steward married the Bruce's daughter cursed his name. But in that hour of Scotland's agony the bait of thirty thousand pounds—and a free pardon—went unsought.

(TO BE CONCLUDED)

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THE LITTLE WAR

By W. A. MACDONALD

Author of "The Water Cover," "The Night Rider," etc.

WHEN the Kenewan Construction Company undertook to erect the largest reenforced concrete stand-pipe in the country on a hill a dozen miles from the town of Kempton the Frane family objected. Their objection took the unpleasant form of armed resistance. Inasmuch as this was at first a surprise and later a series of surprises the construction company was in trouble.

The Frane family's reason for objecting was apparently a sentimental one. It was a large family and for many years had controlled the district. Those who speculated about the case, however, made some mention of the privacy required for the manufacture of distillates unstamped by the internal revenue.

Two reasons militated against suppression of the Frane family's armed resistance. The size, belligerency and marksmanship of the family could be rolled into one reason. Its impermanency of definite habitat and elusiveness of personnel might jointly constitute the other. These facts were ascertained by the Kenewan Construction Company by experience beginning immediately after the initial destruction of the shed intended to house the timekeeper and some of the workmen.

At this particular time the construction company enlisted the reluctant forces of law and order, which failed to find the Frane family in toto or any of its individual members. Following this came the drastic importation of armed guards whose methods, tested in bitter fields, Colorado and West Virginia, were forecast to be of certain fatality to the Franes.

There was no moon on the night of the first attack upon the guards. Certain difficulties were in the way of supplying electric search-lights. Acetylene was the best substitute. While these lights cast their glaring eyes about the encampment there were no attacks. Only occasionally a light went out in a splintering of glass and denting of metal, and later the distant whipping of a rifle-shot found its way across the neighboring valley. In such accuracy as that there is inevitably something sinister.

In the end the guards, who required something to shoot at, lost their nerve. They were accustomed to rushes, they feared no open or ordinary attack; and they were bred in the ways of strikers with whom time is invariably a factor obstructive of strategy. But they were untaught in the independent and ingenious tactics of the Franes.

They were not used to being stalked when they went to town. They were entirely unaccustomed to being shot at through the window of a railroad coach once they had quit the job and were a score of miles on their way to other and more familiar fields of activity. One day it became impossible to retain a guard on the hill. The night that they departed all work of construction was completely erased.

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At this time the Kenewan Construction Company communicated with Taylor.

Their representative found him in the arsenal that connected with his study.

"Come in here," invited Taylor, laying down the heavy automatic pistol he was working on and holding up an oil-covered hand as apology for not shaking. Kendrick, large, bull-necked, well-groomed, obviously the efficient exemplar of business, glanced interestedly about the gun-room. Rifles, racked and cased, revolvers, automatic pistols, an old derringer, single-shot and repeating firearms of all sizes, makes, calibers and curiosities of description adorned and filled the room.

Kendrick who had spent his occasional spell in woods and field recognized some of them: the Savage .303, the Winchester .38-55, .45-90 and .401; the Stevens small-bores; the Remington pump-gun; the Lefever sixteen-gage—these he knew; but there were many others. Knives, too, from stiletto to bolo. And saddles and lariats and that queer, but efficient species of lasso, the Patagonian bolas, consisting of thongs attached to balls of steel. A long pucuna, the blowpipe weapon of the Macusi, lay near a partially uncased bow of yew. Half a dozen quivers for arrows hung about the walls.

Taylor led the way into the living-room and indicated his visitor a chair before the open fire. When Kendrick had accepted his cigar, Taylor filled and lighted a short, black and fragrant briar.

"I don't suppose you ever have any use for the old weapons like the bow and arrow," smiled Kendrick at the bronzed and quiet man with the pleasant, but lean and slightly hard-lined face.

"Yes," Taylor surprised him. "I used a modification of the pucuna in a train-robbery case, the villain a man named McQuatters. I have used the bow and arrow at medium ranges when noise was inadvisable. Once I used the lasso—dropped the noose from a loft and nearly hanged a fiend who had murdered a whole family with an ax a few days before. I have even thrown a tomahawk."

He smiled. Kendrick noted his stillness in his chair, an ease that yet conveyed alertness—the tiger at rest. What Kendrick saw and sensed—and he was a shrewd and aggressive judge of men—he thoroughly approved. This was Taylor, specialist in crimes of violence, who refused any case until everybody else had failed.

"I want you to try this," urged Kendrick, ten minutes later after he had outlined the story of the Franes and the Kenewan Construction Company's stand-pipe. "Bring as many men as you think you'll need. And if then you haven't enough, get some more. We are going to lose money on the stand-pipe, anyway, but we are going to build it if we have to get an army."

THERE arrived at the town of Kempton in about a fortnight a quiet person of a little more than medium height, of lean build and economical assurance of motion, bronzed of skin and pleasant of feature, who spoke softly and without ostentation and whose ostensible business was that of commercial traveler. That is to say, he was accompanied by a number of large, commercial-looking trunks, heavily bound and heavily laden. These trunks he had removed to the hotel.

Of a sudden, in the night, and before he had displayed his wares to any merchant, the trunks were called for and taken in charge by a man who had come over the road that very evening in a very large automobile from parts unknown and a direction opposite that from which the salesman had entered the town. The trunks then disappeared together with the man of the automobile and the salesman—who had taken the precaution of paying his bill in advance.

There was later in the night the sound of a single large explosion in the distant woods, and some one reported having seen the automobile apparently loaded with trunks, depart at reckless speed, the badness of the roads considered, for the south. It was then reported that a khaki tent stood upon the site of the last building erected by the Kenewan Construction Company.

Nobody knew this sooner than the Franes.

The tent stood in a sizable cleared space atop the hill. On one slope it was approached by a wagon road. Elsewhere the forest crowded up all sides of the hill and ringed about the cleared space. Early on the first morning whose dawn revealed the existence of the khaki shelter a tentative shot, whipping faintly from across the valley, proved two things.

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First that the tent was commanded from the crest of the highest hill across the valley or the tall tree atop that crest. Second, that the man who had fired the shot certainly was capable of hitting a mark as large as the tent at the distance indicated by the faintness of the shot. From the khaki shelter came absolutely no indication of human life.

The sun came up in a perfect sky. From hour to hour at very deliberate intervals the thin but sinister sound traversed the green valley, and any one near enough to make inspection would have remarked the thoroughness with which the tent must have been searched out by the steel hornets that, starting about half-way up in the early morning, had bored the khaki at top and bottom and at all intermediate distances. So complete had been the plan and so skilful the handiwork of that man across the valley that no space in which to stand or to lie down had been left unexplored within the tent.

Perfect quiet pervaded the late afternoon. Only occasionally a little wind conversed among the tree-tops. There was no breeze to disturb the lower foliage or the underbrush at all. Yet it did rustle a little at the edge of the cleared space. At dusk a shadow of the numberless shadows that lay at the forest's margin detached itself unnaturally from the rest and slid over the ground toward the tent. At the bottom of the tent it conducted peculiar and furtive activities. Suddenly it rose to the height of a man and entered. As suddenly it reappeared and its attitude suggested perplexity.

The shadow was Pete Frane. Suddenly at a small sound he whipped around the tent like a panther. Thereupon arose from Pete an inhuman, inarticulate and muffled cry as of a man choking and afraid. The man's hands caught and struggled at his throat. Weakness relaxed his figure which spasmed and limpened and sank down.

A thin line fell upon him before he had merged with the ground. It tautened and slithered him over the dirt toward the edge of the clearing. Then the body of Pete Frane disappeared as if swallowed up. Possibly this was an illusion of the dusk. Except for the night sounds of the forest all was still again. If Pete had been supported by his tribe there was nothing to indicate it.

IT WAS hours before the night noises were complicated again. From the point where Pete had originally emerged from the forest there came a rush, startling and overwhelming. Jack Frane was first in the tent. His brother Phil trod almost upon his heels. The others, half a dozen strong, crowded after—big men, wild, all armed.

"Hurry up with the light," shouted Jack.

There were oaths and the scratching of matches. Fierce, bearded faces sprang into relief in the flares. Some one produced a torch, soaked in oil, and the flame of it leaped up angrily to the tent roof revealing brighter than day the whole interior.

It was empty. Only on a pole in the center there hung—of all things—a telephone box with its receiver on the hook. Startlingly, there in the forest solitude, the bell rang. Sharp, insistent, menacing, it rang again. Old man Frane recovered first.

"Answer it!" he ordered in his bass growl, and saw them hesitate.

"Get out of the way," he cursed. He took down the receiver and put his great, tobacco-stained beard close to the mouthpiece. No electric shock struck him dead. His huge sons crowded about in tense silence. Phil held up the flaming torch above his father.

"Hello," shouted the old man.

Clearly and distinctly a voice replied. What it said struck upon the ear of every man who stood within the tent.

"Mr. Frane," said the voice, hard and cold as steel. "I am entrenched a hundred feet away with one machine gun. I can fire five hundred shots a minute. I also have a search-light which you will step into as you leave the tent. As you come out, one by one, please drop your weapons on the ground and put up your hands. That's all."

The old man dropped the receiver. As he did so a flood of light broke through the walls of the tent, every man standing out clearly in the illumination.

"Give me the torch," snarled Jack. He thrust it against the canvas wall.

"Break for it boys," he cried hoarsely, and went first. As he sprang into the open there was no sound except his own strangled cry. He staggered and went down. Something swung wildly like a live thing at his neck. His father and his brother Phil

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stooped to help him. The others, breaking to left and right, were caught in a dazzle of search-light. There was a rip of darker fire behind the burning eye; a patter and rush of bullets in the leaves, and the throb of the Benet-Mercier. Then silence. The Franes, every one, hopelessly caught, stayed in the light.

"Next time I shoot to kill," called the cold voice from behind the light.

Then it added:

"Take the rope off that man's neck." Old man Frane was nearest. He stooped obediently and worked at the thong that had gripped Jack. It was a thong with three ends. At each end was a heavy ball of steel. On the wall of Taylor's gun-room it had appeared a curio. But the men of the South American pampas would have recognized it as a deadly weapon with which it is possible to kill or strangle a man at fifty yards.

Here, the thong, propelled at terrific speed, had struck Jack Frane full in the throat as he ran. The weights at the three ends, violently arrested in flight, had swung about the man's neck in a strangle-hold. When his father finally tore the gripping thing away the victim was on the verge of being choked to death.

Up the wagon road came the noise of men running. They burst into the scene, spreading fanwise as they reached the clearing. In a twinkling the Franes were surrounded. A man in authority stepped forward and advanced toward the eye of light. Out of the glare a man approached to meet him. There was no mistaking the latter; he was the commercial traveler.

"How do you do Mr. Gray," said he. "How is the revenue service?"

"Mr. Taylor!" exclaimed the other.

Taylor took the proffered hand.

"You'll find a prisoner in the trench I dynamited out for myself," said he. "I captured him with a bolas and a lasso. And, Gray, he told me where the still is. So I guess you have your men this time."

Old man Frane, glowering under the eye of a guard, heard him. Fiercely he protruded his bearded chin toward Taylor.

"You lie," he shouted. "Pete never told you where no still was. That ain't Pete."

Taylor stepped in front of the old man and looked him in the eye.

"Pete told me," he repeated directly.

"You lie," snarled the old man.

He towered above the other, bulky, powerful, bearded. But the keen, hard face he looked into was not less than his own the face of the fighting man.

"It wasn't his fault," said Taylor. "I put him under ether when he refused to tell me—and he told me when he came out of it."

A paroxysm of anger shook the old man. Then it was over. There was an instant of indecision, and something like a grim smile struggled beneath the yellowed beard.

"I can't help one thing," he rumbled looking around at his stalwart but disarmed and chagrined sons, "I can't help but say that I have to admire yuh, Mr. Taylor."

"The same to you, sir," said Taylor, holding out his hand.

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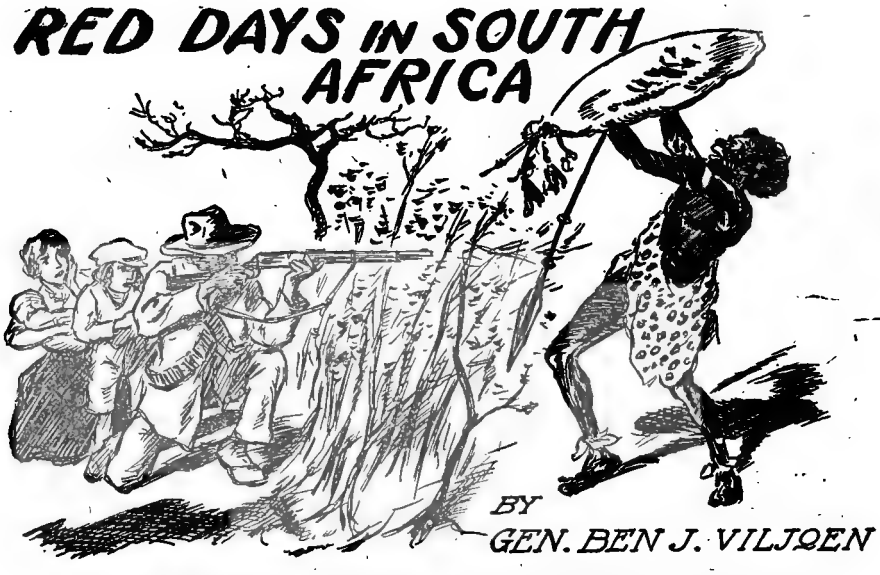
RED DAYS IN SOUTH AFRICA



BY GEN. BEN J. VILJOEN

Author of "The Story of a Piebald Horse," and "Pathos and Humor of Wartime."

Editor's Note: Most of you are familiar with the conspicuous part played by General Viljoen during the Boer War and most of you know that he died not long ago in our Southwest, an exile from the land he loved and fought for. *Adventure* was fortunate enough to have secured from him his own story of one of the great adventures of his eventful life—a bloody event that came into his boyhood days when the whites of South Africa held to their lives by only the slender thread of native temper and the stronger thread of their own grit and courage. It is a dead man telling of his youth.

THERE was no longer any doubt that the Kaffirs were on the warpath. All the Kaffir servants but Samptsau on our farm in Northern Transvaal, had disappeared the night before.

Samptsau was standing behind my chair, as was his custom, as we sat at dinner. He leaned over me and speaking in an undertone, in the Kaffir tongue said:

"Today I saw many of Moshesh's men in full war paint cross the river and proceed toward the forest at about sunset. One of the king's *indunas* (councilors) came to where I was herding the sheep and asked me many questions about the 'old boss,' and gave me the king's orders."

Moshesh was the bloodthirsty king of Zululand.

"We should heed the warning," said my mother. "We must leave and escape the wrath of these savages. Have we not been sufficiently warned?"

My father called Samptsau to him.

"My boy," he said looking the Kaffir lad straight in the eye. "I have raised you from a little piccaninny, like one of my children. You must tell me the truth, are your people starting war against us?"

Samptsau looked down his nose and hesitated. After several minutes' silence he lifted his little woolly black head. The whites of his large eyes barely showing, he glanced from one to the other in a bewildered manner.

"Ah my old *Baas* (Sir)," he said with a quivering voice, "I am your child, for you have raised me. You gave me milk to drink with your own hand, when I was very small. The Old Missus, she is my mama; she doctored me when I was ill, she gave me candy when other Kaffir children got none. Yet, old *Baas* I am a Kaffir; I am one of Moshesh's dogs. I must bark when the great king orders me. My one foot is in your house, and the other foot is in the forest with the *amadodas* (warriors)."

"Then are you going to desert us?" asked my father reproachfully.

"*Auh nkosi yàmi* (oh, my master), my one heart tells me stay with you, but my other heart tells me run to the forest to my people," answered the confused Samptsau.

He had lived within the protection of our home ever since he was a few months old, until now he was half grown, but had

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not lost the instinct of the savage. Civilization had found no echo or response within his bosom. It was almost pathetic to see the struggle in the mind of the young Kaffir. Yet, civilization lost, and his native instinct triumphed.

It was only too apparent that in giving us warning he had conceded as much as we could expect of him. Before midnight, Samptsau was found to have slipped out of the porch room in which he slept, taking with him only his native garb of blankets and beads.

II

FROM the first, the dreaded Moshesh had not concealed his hatred of the white-skin. He had resisted the advance of civilization toward his sacred domain. No white man had ever penetrated to the interior. Even Livingstone and Stanley had not dared to tread the forbidden land where the elephant and the wild ostrich roamed undisturbed.

Fearful that his domain was at last to be invaded during those wild, stormy days of the seventies, Moshesh had called his councilors about him. It was the king's message coming secondhand to our Kaffir boy Samptsau that put us upon our guard.

"The white-faces are eager for the yellow metal and the glistening stone that shines bright like the sun," the Zulu king had said. "My country is rich with these. The white dogs, curse them, are schemers. They will bribe my people to lead them to the old mines where my father dug out these things and, if they once see them and touch with their hands the gold and shining stones they are so crazy about, the white ants will swarm into my country like the locusts and my warriors will tire and their *assegais* will be worn out before they can kill them all. And if we do not kill them to the last one, they will call more to come from across the great water and they will take away our country, our cattle and our wives. The curse of Chaka and the rainbow on them.

"I speak, therefore, and let my *indunas* hear the word and carry it forth to all the children of Chaka. Sharpen your *assegais*, harden your shields, and on the last night of this moon, while the white-faces are yet dreaming of the yellow metal and the shining stones, stab your *assegais* deep and while the blood is still warm and dripping from the blade, rub your muscles with it so that courage and victory may come speedily to my warriors.

"When you have finished those nearest to our borders, go onward until you get the leader. Cut his heart out and bring it to me and when your *assegais* have become blunt return and we shall rest two moons while we eat of their cattle and snuff the powdered hearts of the white-faces."

III

MY FATHER'S first impulse after the Kaffir boy's warning and significant departure was to hitch up a team of oxen immediately and take the family to the nearest *laager* (camp or refuge) but we had more than six thousand head of stock, and my father could not drive the ox-team and manage the stock at night without help. It was decided to take the chance of remaining until morning. During the night we would pack the most necessary things and at dawn mother would start the children in the wagon for the *laager* and father would follow with the stock.

It was a night of anxiety and fear. Nobody except the smaller children, who did not realize the danger, slept. With his rifle and *bandolier* father did picket duty all night. From time to time mother, anxiously and nervously packing things, would stop long enough to prepare a cup of coffee and I would take it out to my father.

Day at last began to break and it seemed that we would be on our way before the Kaffirs came. But in the instant that hope began to rise, sounds came from the forest that filled us with terror and despair. The Kaffirs were coming.

Like a huge cloud driven by the wind they swept down upon our little defenseless homestead. At the first sound from the forest, father had come to the house.

"There is no hope of escape now," he hurriedly said to mother. "They are coming. If they do not find me here they may spare you and the children. I will hide in the thicket in the orchard. If they attack you and the children I will kill as many as I can and make them pay dearly for our lives."

Father well knew the way of the Kaffirs. They killed the men first and then slaughtered the women and children. Our only

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hope was for father to keep out of their way, for they sometimes spared women and children when there were no men to kill.

THE Kaffirs were upon us. They threw open the cattle and sheep corrals and stampeded the stock. The torch was applied to the outbuildings, and as the flames leaped up the horde of savages rushed our house with blood-curdling whoops and yells.

They jumped in through the doors and windows and ran through the house smashing furniture and dismantling the rooms, looking for my father. Then, enraged at not finding him, they set fire to the house. Mother dragged the frantic children from the burning house, at the same time catching up a few pieces of clothing, but these were snatched from her and thrown back into the flames.

"You don't need clothes, you white dogs!" shouted the savages. "Moshesh wants your livers. *Bulala!* (Kill!)

My mother, my three sisters and myself were dragged and buffeted here and there. The bucks prodded me with their *assegais*.

"Let the women live," shouted a buck, "but kill the *kwedenie* (boy)."

"Why let the women live?" demanded a surly brave.

"The old one gave us medicine when we came to her sick," he answered.

"She is a doctor and she may be a witch and cause our *assegais* to waver."

"All right, kill the little steer!" shouted the savages. And a score of *assegais* were poised and pointed at my heart. In a transport of terror I clung to my mother. She begged them to kill her and spare me.

"Kill the *kwedenie!*" they shouted.

A young buck darted forward and stabbed at me. But, quick as lightning, mother struck the *assegai* aside and the point only grazed my shoulder. Another stabbed at me, and my mother threw herself between us and received the thrust in her arm.

Before another *assegai* could be hurled, a black boy darted forward between us and the savages. It was Samptsau.

"Stop, you cowards!" he cried. "Are you blind? Will you war on the woman who has doctored so many of you? Don't you remember when the king's child was dying she gave it medicine and saved its life? Don't dare to touch her or her children, lest your *assegais* bounce back into your own breasts."

It was a heroic deed. But the savages wanted to kill, and they were not to be dissuaded by a boy. Enraged by his opposition, they made another rush and would have carried him off his feet, had it not been for a big Kaffir who sprang to his side and, raising his *assegai* menacingly, commanded the savages to fall back. It was Matiso, Samptsau's uncle, a Kaffir of authority.

"The boy is right," he cried, awing the others into silence. "The first to lay a hand on the woman and her children will die by my hand."

Calling a few of the older men to him, they formed a circle around us, and thus protected we moved away, at Matiso's direction, to the orchard.

"Where is Sipekkepekke?" (my father's Kaffir name) asked Matiso as soon as we were a little distance from the burning house.

"He left last night, and I do not know where he went," said my mother.

"I am glad of that," said Matiso. "They would never have spared you if he had been here. They would have killed him, and at the sight of blood they would not have stopped until you were all dead."

Our home was soon a heap of smoldering ruins. Near by lay the carcass of our mastiff watch-dog, which had rushed to our defense when the Kaffirs came, only to be hacked to death with their battle-axes. Around the ruins the savages sang their war-songs and danced their terrible *sibungu*. All day we were huddled together in the orchard, constantly fearful that the savages would yet decide to kill us.

Suddenly, late in the afternoon, there came to us the sound of rifle-firing beyond the hillock to the east of our house. Later we learned the reason for the shooting. Several stock farmers were fighting for their lives. With wild yells the savages swarmed over the hillock and down the other side. In a little while the firing ceased. The next day the farmers and their families were all found massacred and their farms desolated.

As the sun sank behind the peaks of the Matoppo Mountains and the sounds which came over the hillock indicated that the Kaffirs were rushing on to the eastward, bent upon a night of flame and slaughter,

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father came cautiously from the thicket. No word was spoken. He gathered us all in his arms and we sank down on our knees and thanked God for our deliverance.

IV

WHEN Moshesh's hordes had swept down that fatal morning upon our defenseless home no one had even a glimmer of hope that we would be alive by night. Our escape was indeed a miracle. Had it not been for father's judgment in concealing himself we would assuredly have been counted among the many victims of that memorable day.

The spot where it had been decided that the pioneers should gather in camp, and prepare defenses in case of an outbreak, lay fourteen miles away. There lay our only road of hope. Although we found ourselves well-nigh exhausted, after that strenuous day of trials and agonies, without water or food, we pulled ourselves together and started on the journey. I was a hardened farm lad and accustomed to walking, yet before our long night march was half completed my legs began to wabble. When I saw that my poor mother, as well as my father, had each to carry one of the little sisters, I decided that there was no other hope for me than to trot on.

In the clear, starlight night, we could see the red reflection of burning farms and homesteads tinting the sky in all directions. About midnight we reached a little creek. The rippling sound of a stream of fresh mountain water which greeted our burning ears was the most harmonious melody I had ever heard. We drank eagerly and then took a short rest on the green grass. Father was constantly on the alert, for we knew not what we might yet encounter. The night's deathly calm, interrupted only by the somber "hoo-hoo" of the owl, seemed to forebode approaching danger.

Presently father, who was keeping watch, motioned us to follow. We all rose and followed him in silence as he led us a hundred feet away from the road. There we halted and he motioned us to sit down at the same time giving instructions not to speak above a whisper—he heard voices ahead and wanted to find out who it could be. Father went on alone to investigate.

After an absence of an hour, which seemed to us like a week, he returned. Though it was night, I could see his countenance was pale and his voice trembled.

"Let us be gone without further delay," he said. "We must make a long detour through the *veldt* (country) and leave the trail. Over there—" pointing ahead—"not two hundred yards away, the Kaffirs have just killed some people. Hush," he commanded, "listen; you can still hear the voices of others."

As he said this we heard the shrill voice of an infant, in sharp contrast to the moans of men and women apparently in agony.

As we were about to proceed, a large body of Basutos sprang into view. They were coming along the road which fortunately we had left only a few minutes before. We all laid down flat in the grass, holding our breaths. The warriors, fresh from their bloody work, brushed past us, singing their hideous war-song, "*Isibungo.*"

As soon as it could be done with safety, my father advanced toward the spot from whence came the sound of voices. In spite of the fact that it was against his orders, I stole away from the family and followed him at a little distance. As we came nearer, the voices became more audible. We had hardly gone a hundred yards when before our eyes loomed one of the most ghastly sights I ever saw. About twelve Kaffir warriors were plundering the apparently lifeless bodies of a score of men, women and children scattered in the road. The crimes of some of these savages were fiendish beyond description.

My father's first thought was for our own safety, and he looked back with much concern toward the spot where he had left his family. The cruel and barbarous tragedy before him had fired him with the desire to avenge the suffering and death inflicted. His eyes frightened me, for a grim determination shone in them.

He deliberately emptied his *bandolier* into his coat pockets and keeping one cartridge in his hand and holding two more in his mouth for quick action, as an old fighter is apt to do, he leveled his Martini-Henry rifle on the black devil who seemed to be the leader of the band—and fired. As the report of the old-fashioned rifle rang through the still night, the hillocks across the creek gave a double echo. The Zulu fell dead.

The other savages greatly surprised, rushed forward and crowded around their

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dead comrade, evidently thinking one of their white victims had fired the shot. My father, taking advantage of the ensuing confusion, rapidly fired four—five—six, shots into them. But by this time we were discovered and three of them rushed at us with their spears poised. My father picked them off one by one in rapid succession, the last attacking black falling dead only a few feet in front of us. Those left, I never knew how many, broke and ran. We went forward and found nine of the black brutes lying among their victims.

The scene was indeed a pitiable one. Three of our neighbors lay with their heads severed from their bodies, and eighteen women and children, mostly all dead, were also found. A young girl was alive, but unconscious. Several of the smaller children still lived, but were wounded.

These farmers, in their flight, had been overtaken by the Zulus and after a fierce struggle to the last for the lives of their loved ones, had died the cruel death which so many thousands of frontier farmers met at the hands of the South African savages on that fateful day. The three brave fellows had killed over forty Kaffirs before their ammunition had finally given out.

We brought up the rest of our family, to help the few unfortunates with remaining sparks of life in their bodies. Water was carried from the little creek near by, in our hats, in the absence of any kind of receptacle, and my mother bathed the pale, white faces of the innocent victims who were still living. The young girl finally revived, as well as several of the smaller children.

IT WAS not safe for us, however, to abide long. After dragging all the bodies out of the road and covering their features, we took the girl and three children—these were all we could help along—and continued our flight. It was necessary to leave behind five women and two children yet alive, but so near death that it was impossible for them even to take a step. One young woman, whose baby was one of the three children we were taking along, pleaded in a heart-breaking manner not to be left. Her left leg however, had been cut off and we could do no more than bandage the wound with strips of mother's skirt and promise her that we would rush on to the camp and send relief as soon as we reached there. This would be in a few hours, if no further obstructions lay in our path. It tore our heart-strings to leave these unfortunate victims but it was far wiser to rush relief from camp than to wait.

As our burden had now become heavier, we proceeded at but a slow rate. Our progress was further hindered in that we did not dare follow the trail or highway for fear of being ambushed, which necessitated walking through the *veldt*. The grass grew high and wild, and walking, especially at night, was therefore difficult.

I was called upon at intervals to assist in carrying the rescued children, and though every bone in my body was tired, the pity aroused in me at the thought of the recent slaughter seemed to give me strength, and I helped as much as it was possible for a boy to do.

IT WAS long past midnight when the shrill crowing of roosters at a distant farm told us that at last we were nearing a friendly region. But as we walked on and on, it seemed that we would never reach the camp. Once or twice we sat down for a short rest. I was completely worn out and felt a terrible hunger gnawing more fiercely every hour. Once I fell on the grass asleep, and my father had to give me a hard tug to wake me up and keep me going. It was of hunger more than exhaustion that I complained and never did I see a more despairing look of utter helplessness and heartaching sympathy on a woman's face than my mother's presented when I grieved. It was the true mother's feeling for her offspring when food is asked and she has none to give.

We were descending a long, grassy slope, dragging ourselves with our last energy, when the eastern heavens began to flare with the first rays of the young day. When the light grew stronger a scene came into view which made our hearts leap with joy.

Away and beyond the Kubusie River, only about a mile farther on, lay the camp—a veritable sea of wagons and tents. At the first sight of the camp father and mother stopped and, with tears of gladness filling their eyes, looked heavenward and poured forth to God the feelings of their grateful hearts. When we started again to complete the last stage of our desperate flight there was a smile on poor mother's drawn

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and careworn face. She patted me on the head as I trotted by her side, and said:

"Thank the good Lord we are saved."

V

A *LAAGER* in the old frontier days of the seventies was composed of refugee farmers, gathered at a suitable spot where water was obtainable and defense practicable. Those fortunate enough to have fled with their wagons were supplied with clothing, bedding and other necessaries of life. Our family was numbered among those who reached the *laager* absolutely destitute, and friends had to divide their meager supply of bedding and food with us. We were quartered in a ten-by-twelve tent without furniture. Father and mother set to work and gathered chairs and tables of logs and a large box, while dry grass made a comfortable mattress.

The wagons were drawn in a circle, the one against the other, forming a sort of barrier against a probable rush or attack by the Kaffirs, while another wall was built of poles and earth, twenty feet away from the wagons for an outside or first defense. This was strong enough to check an onrush by the enemy, while gun-pits were dug every fifty yards, which were manned every night by squads of four sentries each, who were relieved every four hours. During the day, outposts and patrols scouted several miles around.

Our camp was well supplied with beef, several large stockmen having succeeded in saving their herds. Other supplies were very short and the greatest care was necessary to arrange their distribution so that they should last as long as possible, because we were entirely uncertain whether communication with the outside world would be possible. The fighting strength of our *laager* was one hundred and thirty men, from fourteen years to any age capable of handling a rifle.

Our first thoughts upon arriving at the camp were of the wounded and killed we had left lying along the road the night before. My father immediately reported the ghastly scene and a relief party dashed off to the rescue. Some time later the party returned with the unfortunate victims. We learned after their return that they had had several encounters with the Kaffirs on the way.

THE next day after our arrival in the camp was the Sabbath and, as is the custom of the Boers, at ten o'clock everybody was called to assemble in the open space for divine service. Men, women and children squatted on the grass. An elder of the church, a worthy old farmer with long, white beard, stood in our midst and led the service. There was hardly a single member of the audience who did not mourn the loss of some near and dear realtive, slaughtered by Moshesh's savage hordes during the previous bloody days. Mothers wept and fathers sobbed.

The people arose and with their hands on their hearts vowed that though our condition was precarious our cause for freedom and victory over the relentless Zulus would be carried on while life lasted. But like the wounded deer fleeing the approach of the lion or wolf, surrounded on all sides by millions of bloodthirsty savages, our little group representing civilization and Christianity away in the interior regions of the Dark Continent, shuddered.

After the religious services, preparation of defense work was continued. Scouts brought in reports of two large Kaffir commands to the south and north seemingly approaching us. As the country is very mountainous it was difficult to judge the strength of the enemy. Our commanding officer, a level-headed and resourceful leader, ordered no lights after dark and absolute quiet. Every man was detailed under section commanders.

The sun sank behind the towering mountain peaks. The sky was hazy and the peculiar African twilight became transformed into a gray gloom that seemed indicative of approaching mischief. Darkness soon enshrouded the little *laager*. Not a light was visible, and the few words spoken were uttered in undertones; the deathly silence was broken only by a bleating sheep or a mooing cow.

Hours passed without incident. Only innocent children, too young to realize conditions, were slumbering. Others were all awake. How could even the strong hand of sleep force a woman to slumber when the lives of her husband and offspring were never spared by the merciless Kaffir?

At midnight a thunderstorm of savage proportions burst over the *laager*. Our tent blew over—so did many others, and the cold rain falling in my face woke me

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from a deep sleep. Although the storm passed over shortly a steady rain continued. The darkness was impenetrable.

My father came in from picket duty and told us that they could not possibly see two feet ahead of them and if the Kaffirs should attack they would not discover them until they were right against the defense works—it was ideal weather indeed for the Kaffirs to make an assault. Any moment the alarm was expected. The suspense was almost unbearable. The ever-repeating raindrops against the reerected tent splashed forth in sickening monotony. But by three o'clock it seemed the night must pass without calamity.

Suddenly a shot rang out loud and shrill, the surrounding hills echoing the report. A second and third shot, then a volley was fired. Bullets whizzed over our heads; bullets struck the tops of the wagons and tents. Then came the Kaffir war-cry, accompanied by the beating on their shields. The war-whoop was bellowed in harmony by five or six thousand warriors. Its weird, almost inhuman sound was blood-curdling.

The Kaffirs stormed our *laager* with savage fierceness. Our men shot them down by the score. The savages in their mad rush reached the earthworks. Their *assegais* rained into the *laager*. Driven back, the Kaffirs again and again renewed the attack, at the same time keeping up their fiendish war-whoops.

At daybreak the fighting was still raging. Several of the savages had succeeded in getting over the defense works, but these were killed in the midst of our wagons and tents. The enemy made a last rush about six o'clock in the morning. They were beaten back and gradually withdrew altogether.

A REVOLTING scene was revealed both in and outside the *laager* when the curtain of darkness was raised after the tragic drama. Our own losses numerically, were small—five of our brave men killed and seven wounded. But outside, around the defense—my God, what a spectacle! Walls of dead and wounded Kaffirs lay stacked high one upon another! A count of the enemy's losses showed thirty-four hundred and seventy! We had no doctor, no ambulance and little medicine. The only humane thing to do was to shoot the fatally wounded. Most of the slightly wounded Kaffirs had been carried away by their comrades. At least a wagon-load of *assegais* was gathered in the *laager*.

There followed a long tedious siege in the little frontier *laager*. For twelve long months, we were practically isolated from the world. Relief was attempted on several occasions, we eventually learned, but failed because conditions were such that from no point could a force of any consequence be spared. Convoys were difficult to move toward us. The country was mountainous and rough, deep cañons and dense forests had to be penetrated. It would have been extremely difficult to extricate an army from a well-organized ambush of Kaffirs.

Although we were somewhat scantily supplied, our *laager* was now well fortified. Patrols of a score or more mounted men even went out daily and succeeded in capturing cattle sufficient to supply meat and milk for the *laager*. Some grain was secured when, after a brisk fight, our people succeeded in dispersing a column of Kaffir warriors, who were conveying a quantity of grain on pack-oxen. We were, therefore, never reduced to actual starvation, though the supplies ran extremely low at times.

Once while our cattle were grazing close to the *laager*, in charge of a strong guard, a party of Kaffirs unexpectedly emerged from a bushy *kloof*, (cañon) stampeded the stock and succeeded in carrying off all but a few oxen, before the guard could be reinforced. It took a month before our men succeeded in capturing cattle again. In the meantime meat was "*non est.*"

Twice in succession was our *laager* attacked, once in the night during a heavy fog, and once in the afternoon. Both times our men withstood the onslaught and drove off the savages with heavy losses.

AS TIME went on, a mantle of anxiety and care enshrouded our camp. Then when a patrol of twenty-five men went out one day for the usual reconnoitering and at nightfall failed to return our courage seemed strained almost to the breaking-point. Among them were members of almost every family in the *laager*. Hardly an eye was closed that night. Men tried to assign a plausible cause for the failure of the patrol to return, but the wives and mothers of the absent members knew that only a disaster and

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annihilation of the whole contingent would prevent their return. Yet as they were all dead-shots, well armed, good horsemen, and well mounted, we felt that some one would escape and bring back any fatal tidings.

Daylight lifted the cloak of darkness. The sun rose bright and cheerful, but not a ray of hope of the twenty-five missing men. The somber hills, the dark forests by the mountain-sides, revealed nothing but mysterious silence. At seven o'clock a search relief-column was mustered and sent out under an able leader.

The day passed; an almost distressful calm reigned in the *laager*. Only an occasional laugh from the children, ignorant of the cause of the suspense and anxiety, broke the silence. Silent as well as audible prayers were sent up to Heaven by the distressed mothers and wives, pleading for the safety of their loved ones.

The sun went down and darkness enveloped the little *laager*, and still no word from the relief force. The commandant in charge ordered the remainder of his force together in the open spaces of the *laager*. His face was white and drawn as he counted his available force. Fourteen were on sentinel duty around the defenses, and remaining available men numbered thirty-six.

"Well, friends," said the commandant addressing his men, "we are reduced to fifty men tonight. God alone knows the fate of those we have been expecting since sunset and yesterday. If they have all been killed we will doubtless be attacked this night. The Kaffirs will come to complete their bloody work. Our only refuge is in God. Trust in His justice, my friends. Shoot straight, don't waste your ammunition and keep a cool head. Every man sleep in his clothes with *bandolier* and rifle by his side. Double all the guards and all the section corporals remain on duty all night."

Suppressed sobs were audible in every tent. My father was among the missing of the first contingent. My mother was brave. I did not see her weep. Anxiety was, however, apparent in every line of her features. She served supper for my sisters and myself on our packing-case table and offered up grace. Her voice was low and sad.

To our surprise the night passed without incident; no attack was made. In the morning we were greatly heartened when it was rumored that the commandant had said that the missing men would return safe, for if any disaster had befallen them our little *laager* would not have escaped an attack.

ABOUT ten o'clock, the morning following that long night of suspense, a thick, moving mass appeared against the horizon, coming from the north over a high-rolling rise about seven miles away. The dust rose in clouds skyward as the body of indistinguishable objects gradually came into full view. We first believed them to be a multitude of Basutos. But soon a dozen horsemen became visible in the van of the column, scattered in extended order.

Our commandant, through a telescope field-glass, now distinguished the mysterious oncoming army and our scouts from the *laager* who had been sent out early in the morning came in at this moment and confirmed the officer's discovery. The mysterious moving mass was a huge drove of cattle. Furthermore, there were about fifty horsemen and one hundred Kaffirs with the flock.

A whoop of joy went up from our camp. The missing contingents were returning victors, with a hundred captured Kaffirs and thousands of cattle, sheep and horses!

Finally I could distinguish my father riding toward us. Holding on to his stirrup and keeping close to him ran a young Kaffir. As my father came up and dismounted, the Kaffir boy clad only in a red blanket, ran up to me and before I could retreat, grabbed me and said in Kaffir:

"My little baas, *morena wuami*."

It was Samptsau. He was again one of the family and vowed that never again would he leave the white man's home to join his dusky people.

Then came the glad tidings of peace. Moshesh had been captured and his principal chieftains had surrendered. The bloody war came to a sudden end. After a siege lasting the better part of a year the camp dispersed and every family went back to the charred ruins and weeds of its farm to begin life anew. There was no looking back. It was all part of the destinies of those who struggled for civilization in Dark Africa. War had come before; it would probably come again with as little warning.

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The Ambush In The Pipe

BY HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "The One Alone Called Kiwasa," "The Hungry Crystal," etc.

OLD MAN LEWIS, better known to the border as "Never Sink" Lewis from his swimming the muddy Missouri with a heavy pack on his back when chased by hostiles, was wise to the wild regions of the West even in the infancy of the overland trails. He could vaguely remember living among wooden houses and white folks on the Ohio, but it was so far back he sometimes wondered if it were not a dream. The country he now counted as home extended from north of the Oregon Trail to south of the Santa Fé route.

Being a free trapper he naturally entertained a hot hate for all organized fur companies, whether they were Hudson's Bay, American Fur, or Missouri Fur company. Each and every one of them placed a double handicap of danger upon him as he pursued his lonely life; for while watching out for Indians he might be bowled over by an employee of one of the various combines, or vice versa. This secretive mode of living left him simple of soul at the end of forty years' border experience and shy of his own countrymen.

Once or twice a year he met with men of his own ilk, rough, shaggy and picturesquely profane free-traders, gathered for a drinking or gaming bout. Incidentally he had lived with and had fought against nearly all the plains tribes, and viewed Indian and immigrant from the same angle: both interfered with his trapping of beaver. But he felt more at home with the red man.

He lived entirely within the horizon of his five senses. In this he was more red than white. If ever the white corpuscles initiated a rebellion against the savage simplicity of his life he would attribute his distemper to trade whisky at the last post visited, or his losses in some wild night of high stakes, or his failure to outshoot some tattered trapper from the back country. He knew he felt more serene when hidden up in the heart of hostile Indian country, surreptitiously taking the little dam-builders.

But now, although back among the grim Black Hills and suitably isolated from Fort Laramie and the north fork of the Platte, he discovered he was not ready to prepare for the trapping season. There was no rhyme nor reason in such a mood. It was preposterous. He had stolen there to enjoy a patch of real life, to be alone with his tobacco and the beaver; and yet he was conscious of an indefinable discontent. It was as though he waited for something to happen. From the top of a low-wooded ridge he stared over his back trail to the south and sought to discover the reason for his "shiftless" feeling.

"What's gnawin' me?" he impatiently growled. "Th' Dakota are all a-huntin' up north on th' Big Knife. I got lead 'n' powder 'n' salt 'nough—traps waitin' f'r me on the crick—plenty o' terbaccer—wal, what's gnawin' me?"

This review of his assets seemed to leave no loophole for unrest to creep in, still he could not shake off his uneasiness.

Suddenly his old eyes brightened and he grinned through his yellowish-white beard in deep satisfaction.

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"Bet ye that's it," he decided, wagging his head. "Must be that huntin'-knife I lost on Green River. That knife must 'a' popped into my mind without my knowin' it—best knife I ever had."

This conclusion seemed to drive the maggot from his brain and he knocked the heel from his pipe preparatory to crossing the ridge to his hidden home, and taking up his work. His life had been spent in thinking beaver. He had friends who thought buffalo; but so far as he could perceive buffalo were sent on earth to decoy the Indians away on a ceremonial hunt so that the free trapper might have a chance to slip into forbidden beaver country. Buffalo was a crude necessity; beaver spelled luxuries and should be classed with rum and tobacco.

From the plains of the Assiniboine River to far below the Comanche Trail in Texas the buffalo, he knew, was food, clothing and weapons; as vital to the Indians as was the bamboo to the Malay and the palm to the African. But the buffalo was a creature; the beaver was a gentleman. When the Iroquois whipped the neutral nation it was not over buffalo, but because the Five Nations were worried over the decrease of the beaver. The annals of the plains were filled with these commercial wars.

And Never Sink, having centered his life about the wise little dam-builders, bitterly resented the fur companies' efforts to corner the supply. In rasher years he had bucked against the fur companies. In wet weather an ancient memorial wound in his hip caused him to limp a bit; since then he had given the organizations a wide berth.

His conclusion that the Dakota—Sioux, if one wished to be nasty and give them the Chippewa name signifying "snake," hence, "enemy"—were hunting on the Big Knife was based on a knowledge of the tribal custom. For the month was August, when the flesh was fattest, the hair the thinnest, and, consequently, the hide the easiest to dress on both sides.

With disconcerting irrelevancy he suddenly recalled that it was fifteen years ago when he lost the hunting-knife on Green River. The maggot crawled back into his thoughts and he delayed leaving the ridge.

"Cussed if I don't feel like a medicine-man had put a spell on me," he restlessly mumbled, his gaze growing somber. He had assimilated much of the Indian's superstition during his long, nip-and-tuck existence. "Lemme see; Lame Dog (Teton Sioux) has it in f'r me 'bout that blanket. Wonder if he got some o' my ha'r!"

This referred to the Indian belief that a sorcerer could work mental and physical harm by procuring a lock of the proposed victim's hair, or some article he had worn. The trapper fingered his shaggy mane nervously and regretted having appropriated the blanket.

"One more strike 'n' I'll settle down in Sain' Looie 'n' chaw store terbaccer like a gen'l'man," he resolved.

More than once he had promised himself this refined finish, but when it came to bidding the plains good-by he had found it impossible to live cooped up among fixed habitants. The ordinary range of a plains tribe was from five to eight hundred miles. Old Never Sink would have felt cramped and stifled unless free to roam from the Red to the Pecos.

The irony of his fresh decision did not escape his sense of humor, and induced a faint grin, and the amendment—

"That is, I *may* settle down arter this trip—mebbe not till arter th' next—arte th' next two, anyway—prob'ly."

HE DROPPED on his face as if shot through the heart as a bunch of figures galloping in close formation, raced into view on the plain. They came to a halt at the foot of the ridge. The trapper immediately began descending the slope and gained the edge of the woods nearest the group just as one of their number raced south to a sand ridge. Never Sink only needed to glance at the bull-hide shields, stained white with clay, and the white buffalo robes made from the hides of heifers killed in late Fall, to identify them as Dakota.

The western sun glinted on the long strings of brass disks suspended from their necks, the soft wind agitated the red streamers adorning their lances, while the braves remained so many statues, their gaze never quitting the lone rider. These were the highest type of the plains Indian, and their presence there, so far from the Big Knife, puzzled the trapper.

The scout now topped the sand ridge and after one glance began riding his horse frantically in a circle, the signal for "discovery." The trapper caught his breath.

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If this be a hunting party and the discovery meant buffalo the next signal would be the open blanket, held above the head by the two corners and then slowly lowered to the ground. But the scout began riding back and forth his mount jumping erratically. He had discovered an "enemy."

Now he was streaking back, bow and quiver and medicine-bag bouncing at every jump, the long fringe at the seams of his deerskin tunic whipping smartly in the breeze his onrush created. On gaining his companions, and without reining in, he yelped a word, and forthwith the band, as one, wheeled and scurried from view behind the spur of the ridge.

Never Sink was completely disgusted. It must be a large party, doubtless whites, or the band would have ambushed it. Perhaps they were organized trappers. Whatever their identity their coming would spoil the trapper's plans. As Never Sink paused to free his mind his gaze lighted on something sticking upright in the arid soil where the Dakota had come to a halt.

The southern skyline was clear and he ventured from cover to investigate. It was an arrow, jolted from some dogskin quiver when the band turned in flight. Regaining shelter the trapper took time to examine it carefully. The head was barbed, so fashioned to remain in a wound and rankle.

"War arrer," he muttered, twisting the ends of his beard. "Band of young bucks hankerin' to count a coup—I'd give a pound o' terbaccer if it was a huntin' arrer," meaning one with a lanceolate head and easy to withdraw from a wound.

He hurried back to the top of the ridge to watch for the reason of the Indians' precipitate retreat. He concluded it was all of a piece with his strange uneasiness. White men, white men; a never-ending procession of them. He had passed the years in peace and in security, with never a dream that the old order could change in his day. Behold! he already was at the threshold of a new era. So long as they came afoot and on shaggy ponies, these adventurers, the wide prairies and unmapped mountains could absorb them and cover them up.

But they were coming in wagons, and, what was more potent, they were bringing their women and children. Families meant fixed homes, and the latter meant hell for the beaver. Until within a year or so the old trails had seen only soldiers and freighters, trappers and just wanderers—men who had to be alone in the open.

Now the prairie schooners were coming thicker and thicker, not with freight for Salt Lake and Santa Fé, but laden with women and children and homely household gear. It typed the irrepressible longing for homes and cleared land. It sounded the crack o' doom for furry folks.

Never Sink struggled clear of his sad reverie to mull over the strange behavior of the young bucks. It was a small band and must have the tribe's approval before detaching itself from the annual hunt. Even if he had not picked up the war arrow he would have surmised the band had a purpose apart from buffalo. For "still" hunting during the annual tribal hunt was forbidden, and the brave who violated the rule and thus risked frightening the game and preventing a maximum yield of meat and hides to the community did so under a grave penalty, sometimes at the cost of his life.

Never Sink knew this and endeavored to project his deducive powers into the master-mind up on the Big Knife, and learn why the small war party was prowling 'round the hills. He was not the quarry, for none had sought for signs of his trail. Perhaps it was a wagon-train making for Fort Laramie. . . And yet, it could not have been a train the scout had seen, for that would mean the train had deliberately quit the Big Trail to lose itself in the hills.

"But them skunks seen somethin'," he insisted, straining his eyes to detect some movement in the arid desolation. At last his patience was rewarded by a patch of dust, and out of the heart of this rode a band of horsemen. They were making for his ridge and as they drew nearer he could make out travois ponies hauling the teepee poles and covering.

"Pawnees!" he exclaimed with a grunt of relief and yet puzzled that they should venture into the Dakota country for a definite stay, as the teepees evidenced was their intention. "Prob'ly they bank on the Dakota bein' gone to the Big Knife an' figger they can cover the eighty miles to Laramie afore they can be jumped by a big party—thought that ha'r looked natural."

The last had reference to the Pawnee

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style of wearing a ridge of hair from the forehead to the scalp-lock, which stood up like a horn, the rest of the head being shaved.

"The Dakotas will keep out of sight till they can git help from the Big Knife; then they'll jump 'em—reckon I'll drop into their camp termorrer an' give warnin'."

Never Sink felt kindly disposed toward the Pawnees. They had refrained from taking the warpath against the Government even when the new caravan routes were pushed through their territory a few years before—1838—and had spoiled their hunting. He had enjoyed the hospitality of their villages more than once, and, years back, had been on friendly terms with several of their chiefs.

So long as he was alone he believed he was free to come and go among them as he would. An immigrant train might prove too tempting an opportunity to be overlooked, but a solitary trapper would have little to fear. On the whole, he considered the Wolf people had behaved very well toward the whites.

Hastening back to his camp in a snug ravine he cooked his supper and mapped out a course of action. His scheme would place the Pawnee on their guard against the Dakota. If they withdrew from the ridge so much the better for his privacy. He would ride southeast to the Cheyenne and camp a few hours that night, then follow the river beyond the ridge and approach the Indian village in the morning.

He would travel light, posing as one of those prairie nomads who roam aimlessly and widely. After warning them he would start south as though bound for Fort Laramie, leaving them to stay and fight the Dakota or take to their heels. Either event would distract attention from his ravine back of the ridge.

Packing a blanket and a few odds and ends behind the ancient wooden saddle he twisted a cord of hair about the jaw of his pony, Indian fashion, and struck for the river.

IT LACKED two hours of sunup when the barking of a dog across the river brought him from his blanket and sent him scuttling to cover. The dog was worked up to a fine frenzy, but as the trapper shook the last of sleep from his brain he knew it was no Indian dog. As he listened men's voices began calling out through the gray dusk, punctuated by the frightened queries of women. Then several guns were discharged.

"Land o' sin! White folks up here!" he gasped, staring incredulously toward the river.

Something splashed near his shore and he flattened out. There came a rustling in the tall bushes and he counted three furtive forms quit the fringe of trees and make off for the hills.

"Dakotas sizin' up the white folks, sure's I'm pup-high," he muttered, wrinkling his nose in disgust at this new complication. "What the cussed fools out here for? Must 'a' tried a short cut from the Missouri by follerin' the Teton down till they could switch off to tag along th' Cheyenne. Their wagon-boss oughter be skulped. What with them 'n' the Pawnees 'n' the Dakotas I'll git mighty few beaver, I opine."

He was more averse to meeting the newcomers than if they had been Indians. They were from the "East"; perhaps from as far back as the Mississippi. No one but tenderfeet would try to cut across the Dakota country. They'd rake him with all sorts of fool questions; and if they got away without having their hair raised they'd be mighty lucky.

The hubbub across the river now quieted down and gave room for a new note to assert itself. It startled him strangely. It was many years since he had heard a white child cry. The shrill complaint, so brazenly sounded in this primeval environment, repelled and fascinated him. He crawled through the screen of trees and undergrowth and stared in amazement.

The wagon-train, instead of being drawn up in a circle with the stock in the center as a precaution against an attack, was scattered loosely over the interval. It was a large train and perhaps trusted to its show of strength to discourage attacks. But the whole arrangement, rather, lack of arrangement, was madness.

As Never Sink stared and stared and rubbed his eyes and asked himself what special brand of idiocy prompted the taking of such a hazardous route several children piled from the wagons and ran boisterously to the river, their scantily clad limbs flashing in the first pink of dawn. Never Sink waited, expecting every moment the wagon-boss would bawl his orders for the caravan to start.

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"Gosh hemlock!" he spluttered. "The younkers is the first up. No, they did post some guards but they act as though they'd been asleep. They ain't even had anything to eat yet."

The train should have been in motion at sunrise, with scouts flung out on both sides, far ahead and in the rear. The trapper waited an hour without detecting any signs of a departure. Obviously the train was to remain in camp for the day, for the men, while waiting for the morning meal, began overhauling and mending harness, and some of the women followed the children to the river to wash clothes.

"Even Pawnees won't let such easy pickin' 's that git by 'em," groaned the trapper, edging back to his horse. "The Dakotas have watched 'em all along but don't like to tackle em' with a handful. If word 's been sent to the main huntin' party they ain't had time to send help back. Even if the wagon-boss is a idiot the Injuns got to strike soon or lose 'em. Now lemme put it together. The young bucks was hopin' to scare up some o' their own kidney when I first see 'em, an' they found Pawnees. Now they're hungry to clean up both Pawnee an' train. Huh! If they could get the Pawnees to go partners on jumpin' the train——"

"But, dod rot it, they'd have to smoke the pipe afore the Pawnees would trust 'em. If they went to the Pawnees without offerin' the calumet, they'd be wiped out—yessiree! Jest three moves they can make. Tackle the train alone an' lose some o' their men; wait for help to come from Big Knife an' chance the Pawnees gobblin' up the train ahead of 'em; or smoke the calumet with the Pawnees an' strike a bargain—I play the last keerd to turn up. Then, when enough bucks git in from the Big Knife they'll turn 'round and trim the Pawnees."

He ruffled his long hair in perplexity. There was a big fault in his conclusion. If the Dakotas offered the calumet and it was accepted their agreement would be inviolable. But convinced the Dakotas planned mischief against both Pawnee and white the trapper could not imagine a sincere bargain between the two bands of red men.

The old trapper had great respect for the calumet. The Pawnees held it in special reverence, having received it from the sun. All tribes firmly believed punishment was inevitable for those who violated any bargain made over its sacred stem.

The very act of smoking in the calumet transformed the pipe-bowl into an altar, before which the parties to a compact vowed to the sun and other gods that their obligations should be fulfilled. Their strict adherence to all promises made over the calumet did not result from any belief in a heaven and a hell, but simply from an overpowering belief in good and bad luck.

"The Dakotas jest got ter play square if they git the Pawnees ter help 'em; that means good-by fool wagon-train," Never Sink was forced to conclude as he climbed into the saddle.

He was enraged at the immigrants for disturbing his peace of mind and interrupting his work. If they must get themselves killed why hadn't they selected some other spot? But a brain-cell in the back of his mind had made a prisoner of a white child's querulous cry. With a string of whispered oaths he admitted he must take a hand. His first impulse was to ford the river and give the alarm. Reflection warned him the train would be jumped before he could bring order out of confusion; for even now spies were on the watch.

"Reckon they'll raise my ha'r afore I'm through with this country, but I ain't a honin' f'r it to happen insider no circle o' prairie schooners," he told his horse.—"Naw; they can't be helped that-a-way—but if I can reach the Pawnee ahead o' the Dakotas an' git 'em riled up so's they'll wipe out the Dakotas on sight, I might make the train durin' the scrimmage an' git it clear o' the valley. A younker what whimpers an' whines oughter be lambasted—that is, in Injun country."

With that he pricked forward to race the Dakotas to the camp beyond the ridge. Could he arrive ahead of the peace-pipe he stood a good chance of inciting the Wolf people to go in search of the Dakotas, with a fight assured once the two bands met.

DESPITE his brave cognomen the trapper felt his heart waver as he strode from the scrub growth and entered the encampment. The absence of the warriors told him a matter of importance was being discussed in the chief's teepee. A crowd of young bucks rushed forward to surround him, and their bearing was not reassuring. Never Sink had looked for

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this, however, as every unaccredited stranger would naturally be received as an enemy. With no show of concern he raised his right hand and hoarsely cried out, "Hau!" the ancient salutation meaning good.

The early employment of this greeting by the Siouan tribes in dealing with the whites has given rise to the erroneous belief it is an abbreviation of the English, "How are you?" But the trapper had encountered it among the Shoshoni, Arikara, Caddo and other tribes when but a youth; and his inflection was correct and caused the bucks to give him more room and eye him with a kindling of respect.

"The - Man - Who - Cannot - Sink - In - Water will see the chief of the Pawnees," haughtily declared the trapper.

"White Wolf, chief of the Skidi (Wolf people) can not see the white stranger," coldly informed a young brave.

"The chief is my brother. His lodge is open to me. I knew his fathers when the Skidi lived above, north of all other tribes of the Pawnee confederacy," retorted the trapper, now satisfied the Dakota emissaries were before him, and also realizing an attempt at retreat would be fatal.

His one chance was to push on.

"Those who enter the cave of the Wolf may be bitten," was the ominous reminder.

"The Wolf knows his friends. The-Man-Who-Cannot-Sink-In-Water has slept in his cave many times—I see no scars."

And he held up his hands and examined his bony wrists closely.

The young warriors drew aside and the trapper boldly advanced to the largest teepee, one measuring some eighteen feet in diameter and requiring more than a score of buffalo hides to cover it. Years later General Sibley was to take this style of teepee as a pattern for the Sibley tent.

As Never Sink gained the entrance he noted a heraldic painting, representing three horses galloping madly. As it had no bearing on White Wolf's name he shrewdly suspected the chief had counted a coup by striking the teepee of an enemy while on some daring raid, thus winning the right to copy the particular design and hand it down to his descendants.

Never Sink paused for a moment and sniffed tobacco smoke. The ceremony had reached its last stage. Behind him, at a respectful distance yet hemming him in, were grouped the young warriors. Ducking his head he strode through the opening and passed to the guest-place in the west, facing the entrance, and taking care not to pass between his host and the handful of live coals in the center of the circle. Not till he had seated himself did he permit his gaze to range 'round the circle.

Six Dakotas, in all their finery of beads and fringe and brass disks, were glaring at him with murderous intensity. The Pawnee chief, flanked by six warriors on each side, did not deign to notice his entrance. The alliance apparently was completed, for they were finishing smoking the peace-pipe. For several minutes the members of the circle accepted the pipe and puffed the smoke in turn to the sky, the four globe-quarters and the earth.

At the feet of the chief were the rest of the symbolic shafts, fully a half dozen, each adorned with eagle feathers and the hair of the buffalo and fitted with pipe-bowls. They were some eighteen inches long and, the trapper observed, freshly made from ash. He also decided they had been prepared in great haste as he missed the painted beaks of certain birds and other accessories. But nothing was missing to the extent of vitiating their sacred office.

But he marveled that the Dakotas would thus covenant to divide their white prey with the Pawnee. There could be no further doubting of the Dakotas' sincerity, however, as the calumets were the most profoundly sacred objects a North American Indian could pledge his faith upon. The trapper was forced to concede the doom of the wagon-train.

At last the Dakotas rose to depart. One of them took a step toward the trapper, his hand falling to his belt. The Pawnee chief glided before him, saying—

"My brothers must make haste to bring up their young men."

The bearers of the peace-pipe understood; the white man, having entered the chief's teepee, was to enjoy sanctuary. They bowed and murmured something the trapper did not catch, and drawing their white robes over their heads stalked from the teepee, followed by the chief and his warriors. Never Sink gloomily eyed the sacred shafts, the acceptance of which he had been too late to prevent.

"Reckon it's all up with them white folks," he groaned. "I sure got to play it

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slick to save my own hide. No! dod gast it! if I break away I got to go die with that cussed train, jest 'cause they're white an' I was born white. Wal, the ol' hoss will miss me."

SOME thirty minutes passed before the flap was thrown back to admit the chief. He entered alone, and with none of the usual Indian circumlocution he abruptly greeted—

"The white man is very foolish, or very brave, to come unasked to the teepee of White Wolf."

"The - Man - Who - Cannot - Sink - In - Water has heard much of the famous White Wolf from the Comanche and has traveled far to see him," explained Never Sink, producing his pipe and offering the tobacco to earth and sky before filling the black bowl.

His reference to the Comanche was a shrewd guess based on the three running horses painted on the exterior of the teepee; for the Comanche were the horsemen of the plains, *par excellence.* He knew he had scored a hit by the flicker of pride glinting in the chief's stern eyes.

"The white man speaks the tongue of the Wolf people like one who has known them a long time," complimented the chief.

"He spoke it better when the famous White Wolf was a papoose. Running Bear, of the Republican Pawnee, taught him. That was many moons before the peace treaty with the Great White Father at Fort Atkinson (1825)."

This statement registered favorably on the chief, who relaxed his stiff attitude and crouched by the fire and proudly commented:

"Running Bear, though not of the Skidi, was a great chief. My people gave much to the Great White Father at Fort Atkinson. We kept our promise. We have not made war on his Government."

Never Sink bowed and kept silent, deeming it unwise to remind of various forays against the freighters. He burned with impatience to be away and at least carry a warning to the train. Knowing his own fate hinged on the next few minutes he displayed nothing but indolent unconcern.

Neither spoke for some minutes; at last the chief observed—

"My white friend wanders far from the Big Trail."

The tension inside the trapper's breast snapped. The chief had called him "friend" and he felt secure as to his own safety. No one would attempt to harm him so long as he remained with White Wolf. He had won half the battle.

"I have wandered much farther than this from the white trails for many, many moons," he replied. "I have come from the Comanche country, where they still talk of White Wolf. I came to visit the Dakota, but found them all gone to hunt buffalo on the Big Knife."

This second mention of the fierce Comanche flattered White Wolf's pride. He pretended not to notice it, and gravely corrected:

"The Dakota are here. Six of their warriors were in council with White Wolf when my white brother entered."

The chief had called him "brother," much stronger than "friend." The trapper's confidence as to his own status was now fully established.

"Young warriors," he said with a sniff of contempt. "They are but a handful. I saw them riding south. I saw their scout signal an 'enemy.' Then the great White Wolf and his braves came."

The chief's eyes blazed but quickly lost their fires as they dwelt on the sacred shafts.

"The Dakota are my brothers," he rebuked with great dignity. "They have smoked the calumet with White Wolf."

"The Dakota need the mighty White Wolf's help," said the trapper. "Their young men find that which they can not carry away alone and they make peace with a strong man that he may aid them."

White Wolf stirred uncomfortably. He knew the white man had seen the wagon-train and was knowing to the proposed raid. Such a witness, apparently possessing much wisdom, made the situation embarrassing. It might be unfortunate that he had been given sanctuary.

"The - Man - Who - Cannot - Sink - In - Water speaks with two tongues when he says all the Dakota are on the Big Knife," bluntly upbraided the chief.

The trapper once more found himself on thin ice, but his voice was calm and compelling as he retorted:

"He speaks with one tongue. Except a handful of young braves there are no Dakota warriors nearer than the Big Knife.

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These few braves can not bag their own game without the help of White Wolf, who counted a coup by striking a Comanche teepee."

"The teepee of Three Horses," mumbled White Wolf, bowing his head.

He fell to meditating, and the trapper surmised he was regretting his bargain with the Dakota. Had he refused the calumet he could have brushed them aside and taken the prize for himself. But the sacred shafts emanated an all-powerful influence; and gradually his brows cleared, and he said:

"The tribe may be on the Knife as my white brother says. The elders learned from their scouts of the White Wolf's coming. It was right they should call him 'enemy' till they could prepare the calumets and ask for peace—for White Wolf has other warriors coming behind him, bringing their teepees for a long stay, and prepared for war. It is good the Pawnee and the Dakota can live in peace side by side."

And he reverently picked up the ash sticks and held them between him and the trapper.

Never Sink knew it was make or break so far as the wagon-train was concerned. Could he reach it ahead of the Indians it might be possible to drag the heavy wagons in a circle and stand off the red men till a messenger could win through to Fort Laramie. The immigrants, with the best of fortune, would pay a dear price, but it might mean the saving of the women and children.

He replaced his pipe and rose, saying:

"My heart is light now that I have been welcomed by the great chief, whose name runs along the Texas border like fire through dry prairie-grass. I have entered his teepee and sat in the west. When I meet the spirit of Running Bear I shall tell him how one worthy to lead the Skidi gave me welcome."

White Wolf, although deeply impressed by the courtesy of his guest's speech, quickly barred the exit, saying:

"My white brother is very weary. His eyes are heavy. He will rest here."

"He has rested. His legs are light," replied Never Sink.

"Night comes from the dark hills. The owl hoots. Here is shelter and food."

"The night will grow white with light when I think of the great White Wolf's hospitality. The voice of the owl will be that of a sweet song-bird in mating-time when I remember his kind words."

"My white brother is very weary. He will stay here for two sleeps," tersely commanded the chief.

The trapper perceived the chief did not desire him to come to any harm. Nor would he permit him to witness the raid on the wagon-train. His holding him a prisoner for two nights indicated the attack had been scheduled for some time on the morrow. To persist in leaving the teepee would be as useless as it would be fatal. Could he effect his escape during the night—a slim possibility—he might make the train ahead of the Indians and take potluck with the immigrants in the finale.

"My young brother is very wise. He sees my aches and pains from long traveling," he sighed, sinking back on the buffalo robes.

"It is well," grunted the chief. "After two sleeps my brother shall go where he will. The medicine of the calumets will sooth his rest."

And he picked up the peace-pipe and gently thrust it into the bundle of calumets.

Never Sink, who was glowering heavily at the ash shafts, felt a prickly sensation tingling his old limbs, and he feared his eyes had deceived him. Leaning forward he requested—

"May the white brother of White Wolf see the calumets closer to breathe in their mighty medicine?"

White Wolf passed over the bundle. Never Sink loosened the deerskin thong and plucked one forth. He had noted that one side of this shaft appeared to be bare of buffalo hair; and the wild hope sprung up in his heart that the inexplicable willingness of the Dakota to make peace with the Pawnee was about to be explained.

The Dakota would not dare to break their vows registered with the calumet. But among all tribes the calumets must be accepted at face value, and if one be false and contained in tangible form a covert warning of treachery on the part of the profferer, the bargain could be disregarded and no faith would be violated.

"The sacred hair fell off when my brother, the Dakota, passed them to me, one by one," informed the chief, observing the trapper's attention was attracted to the naked shaft. "They prepared them quickly

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and the pitch did not have time to harden."

"And White Wolf, being a noble warrior and above all trickery, did not examine it closely," thundered the trapper, springing toward the opening to obtain more light. "Look! my brother of the Wolf! Let his eyes be keen as they are when they search for a snake in the grass, for I will show him the trail of the Great Snake, the Sioux.

"The Great Snake planned to use you in capturing the wagon-train, but as soon as enough warriors come from the Big Knife you were to be suddenly attacked and killed. For this is a false shaft and it poisons all the other shafts!"

And he placed a trembling finger on the barely discernible tracing of a viper, coiled about the stick.

With a howl of rage White Wolf snatched the perfidious calumet and glared at it ferociously. It vitiated the sacred nature of the recent peace pact. It was an advertisement of the Dakotas' purpose to play him false. Waving it above his head and sounding his war-cry White Wolf bounded from the teepee into the midst of his braves.

OLD NEVER SINK, riding ahead of the wagons, reined in and pointed toward a cloud of dust and informed, "Another wagon-train on the trail. Them folks has brains 'nough not to try short cuts. Ye're safe now an' I'll be turnin' back to mind my own business, providin' them Injuns has fought it out. Ye'll strike Laramie some time termorrer."

"You've done us a mighty good turn, Mister Lewis. When the wagon-boss died and I was put in command it seemed easy to make the cut-off. I never suspected the truth till we heard the screaming and fighting and you rode out of the river and cried for us to hitch up. We thought——"

"——! talk sense. Don't say ye thought," roared the trapper, his irritation reaching the breaking-point, now the danger was over and he had time to realize how seriously his own plans had been interrupted. "If any more fool outfits come along the tribes can draw straws to see which takes 'em."

And he viciously yanked his horse about to take the back track.

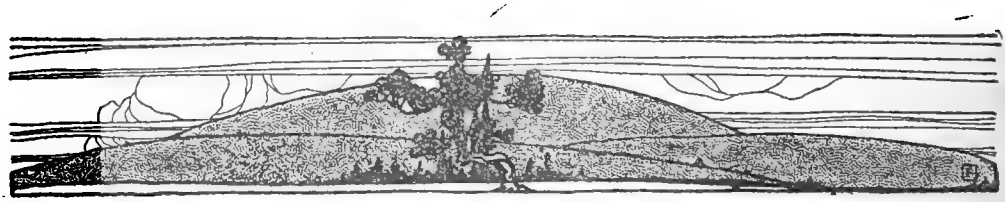
"Oh, please, Mister Lewis, say good-by to Neddy first," cried a worn-looking young woman.

Old Never Sink frowned villainously then gruffly said:

"Wal, lemme see him, then. If he hadn't had sense 'nough to bawl out an' let me know this fool train was lost I'd 'a' never been on hand to help any."

With that he reined alongside a schooner and thrust his head under the cover. The soiled canvas became violently agitated and shrill squeals of juvenile joy filled the interior. Finally the trapper withdrew his head and smoothed out his ruffled beard and sheepishly informed:

"Reckon I'd better go the whole hog till ye git straddle o' the trail. What that younker o' yourn needs, ma'am, is a hoss an' a rifle."



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Author of "The Lurking Poison," "The Salters," etc.

OF ALL things that can happen to a ranchman living far from any assistance, fire is the worst. He can not guard against it. A spark blown from a branding-fire, a live cigaret-butt properly placed on the range, may cause the loss of thousands of dollars of property.

Realizing this I understood the loquacity of the man with the pointed nose. He had corraled Wilson by the well and was talking insistently when I rode in with John Wilkes, Deputy Sheriff. At once we were included in the conversation.

"I needn't tell you gentlemen what a boon to dry farmers fire insurance is! Why you're liable at any moment to see the earnin's of years go up in smoke. I been talkin' to my friend here about it, tellin' him what a mistake he's makin' by not takin' out enough insurance to cover his crops——"

"Sure. That's right. Take out a dollar's wuth, Jim," suggested Mr. Wilkes. "That'll cover the field of alfalfa you got."

"Have you saw 'Hawse-hide' Smith?" he asked turning to the agent. "I on'y mention it because Hawse-hide has recently took up a new tract o' forty acres down by the Barbicumbre. He's aimin' to supply the eatin'-houses of the railroad an' the dinin'-cars an' he's had a lot of letters from big firms in El Paso tellin' him that they're prepared to take all the stuff that he can raise."

I looked at him with some suspicion. The agent, never doubting, took out his note-book and prepared to make an entry.

"Full name please?"

"Hawse-hide Smith."

The agent looked perplexed as he well might.

"That's a funny name——"

"No it ain't," snapped Mr. Wilkes irritably. "It ain't any funnier 'n namin' a girl Beryl, after a stone—er Hazel, after a nut. They named him Hawse-hide on account of his trade, which was hidin' other people's hawses out in the chaparral where they couldn't find 'em an' he could. He ain't what you might call proud of it though. You might see him, if you'd be willin' to insure his crop against loss by fire."

"We make a point of insurin' any an' all crops against loss by fire my friend," said the agent grandliloquently. "Does he raise much?"

"He's figgerin' on two thousand dollars a year from them forty acres. That's all I know."

The agent made some hieroglyphic notes.

"What does he raise?" he asked presently.

"Watercress," said Mr. Wilkes. "Watercress and a lot o' leeks."

A strained silence fell during which the agent went to his automobile and extracted a bottle as pleasantly as one would extract a pet tooth.

"It's on me," he said sourly. "But you

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know that what I tell you's the truth just the same."

"Sure it is," agreed Mr. Wilkes wiping his mouth on the back of a none-too-clean hand. He picked up a stone and threw it idly enough at the gaudily painted sign that hung before Wilson's house that announced to all the wondering world that he sold gasoline and grease, feed and forage and that "dry farmer's babies" were "nursed while you wait."

"I wasn't makin' fun of you-all," put in Mr. Wilkes. "I believe in what you say an' if I was a rancher—I mean a dry rancher—I sure would insure against fire. The Lord knows I've saw enough down here to make me insure against most anything that I could. Fortunately you-all down here don't have to fight what I've saw a whole town a fightin'."

The agent asked the question.

"What? Man, I mean a fire-bug. You only strike 'em in thickly settled communities. Out here there ain't nothin' to tempt 'em, but back East you put a can of ile, a pair of old pants and a match in the stable and in a month the whole thing's gone up in smoke. Don't tell me! I know."

The agent said something about Federal law.

"Federal law be blowed. You can't convict a man—not even in Kansas—unless you kin make a jury believe he done somethin'. There's on'y one thing that people'll believe against a man, without proof, and that is that he's took to drinkin'. Now where I was brought up—an' that's back in Clermont County, Ohio—well, sir—just as I've told you, I've seen the *whole* town set goin' like a Democratic torchlight procession in November, an' all by reason of these here fire-bugs. Of course, that was long before the days of insurance—I mean before it was anyways a regular business like it is now.

"Why, man, I remember that my old father always seemed to feel that to insure his life was somethin' sacrilegious. Lord, man! When I think of them times it makes me fair homesick fer the times that was. I didn't like 'em *then* no more'n I liked an achin' tooth, 'cause it meant gittin' up at three o'clock to feed the stock an' split wood fer the day an' then to be at work in the fields by sun-up.

"Amusement? Who said amusement? We didn't have none except once, I mind, there was an eclipse of the moon an' I was let sit up fer it. That an' church socials where we like to foundered ourselves eatin' strawberries so spiled that nobody'd buy so they was give to the church.

"That was when I was nothin' but a kid. Then come days when they worked me harder but give me more freedom. Why man there was even days when I was given the precious privilege on Saturday nights of hitchin' up a sore-backed horse, that'd been plowin' bottomland all day, an' drivin' him over to see some girl. There was two I mind. Ah well—that too is only a memory—a memory of forty years ago."

Mr. Wilkes stared off into the sunset and smiled reminiscently. We waited.

"Camp-meetin's an' church socials—Gosh! We was fair stampeded with 'em. I mind one time when we had an eyster supper—an' that mind you out in Ohio, where all the eysters that we got was shipped by freight in wagons over the Alleghany Mountains and by boat down the Ohio. Of course we never seed an eyster at the eyster supper but there was chicken, fried an' roasted, an' hot an' cold, an' goose, an' fish, an' about twenty kinds o' bread. That was when the Staggerses lost their baby."

"Killed?"

"Nope. Jus' lost."

The agent rose disgustedly.

"I reckon I'll be goin'," he said, "if you-all don't want no insurance. What's this here Wanderin' Willie tale o' yourn got to do with insurance anyways?" he demanded of Mr. Wilkes.

Mr. Wilkes looked at him equably.

"What's scratchin' got to do with itchin'?" he inquired pleasantly. "They ain't no ways alike—as I was sayin'——"

The agent sat down.

"AS I was sayin', I lived there as a boy an' man fer twenty-two years; but it wasn't till just seven years after that 'ere eyster supper that fire-bugs was prominent in our society. Some people said they started that night but took time to grow up. I remember well enough that when I got to that church that night the first person I seen was Hiram Staggers. He was a wizened-up little feller what had taken up a 'eighty,' five miles from us; an' him and his family like to starved to death whiles he was workin' it.

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"They'd sure have been in the poor-house if it hadn't been fer Mis' Staggers. She was always one to holler fer women's rights. She like to converted my old father once. They was settin' by the fire arguin' —her and my ol' mother'd been makin' rag carpets. There was a good fire goin' in the hearth. We-all was settin' around roastin' chestnuts in the glow an' the two big dogs was lyin' on the hearthrug. Ol' Mis' Staggers she says:

" 'Why should it not be so, Peter Wilkes —why not? Why should not women be allowed to enter all fields with men? Are they not men's equals? Are they er are they not?' she says.

"Ol' dad'd been sleepin' in the jamb. He come out of it just in time to hear the question. He rubbed his eyes an' says—

" 'Yes'm; they're not,' he says.

" 'What?' she says. 'What? What is there that women can not do?'

"Dad he looked around helpless but she had him fixed with her eyes an' he had to say somethin'. Finally he looked at the dogs—ol' Lion was settin' up on his hind legs beggin' fer a chestnut.

" 'There,' says dad some triumphant like, 'that ol' dog, fool as he is, Mis' Staggers, is a doin' of somethin' right now that no woman kin do.

"She turned round as quick as a flash and I'll be doggoned if by the time she turned to look at old Lion, if he hadn't rolled over on his side an' wasn't scratchin' fer fleas.

"She never quite forgive the old man fer that. Swore he said it on purpose an' it was years before the two famblies was on intimate terms again. Well this here Mis' Staggers was so sot on bein' on equal terms with men, that she worked on the farm, tended cattle, done the chores about the place an' worked like a Mormon elder at a Sealin' Frolic but they couldn't make both ends meet.

"It was after a long, hard Winter when they near starved to death that Mis' Staggers fust heard of insurance agents. A feller come through the county solicitin' people to take out policies an' from him she learned that a good livin' was to be picked up easy enough by just talkin' other people into doin' things. Fer ten years she'd been talkin' ol' Hiram into tendin' to the farm an' workin' when he didn't want to work, so she figgered she'd have an easy thing of it.

"Man, but she worked. Them old sore-backed horses of theirn sure traveled them county roads that Summer. I heard her tell my ol' mother that she made four thousand dollars in the first eight months an' when the mortgage was paid offen their big new house an' the house-warmin' was over—well, sir, the next thing in the way of entertainments that that county was bid to was to a big christenin' over to the Staggerses.

"I reckon there was sixty people gathered in the front rooms when the parson come in all dressed fer the frolic an' Mis' White, a neighbor, come into the room carryin' the new baby on a piller. Mis' Staggers come in an' set down an' the people all was wonderin' whether it was a boy er a girl. They didn't find out till the preacher says—

" 'Name this child,' an' then Mis' Staggers says standin' up an' speakin' loud an' clear:

" 'I worked hard fer this house. I worked hard fer this bit of prosperity that we all've had, an' now I'm goin' to name my daughter somethin' that'll be a token of gratitude,' she says, 'to the contributory cause o' good-luck,' she says. 'An' as she belongs to me an' Hiram mutual I name her—Fidelity Mutual.'

"The funny thing about that baptism was that the kid was all wrapped up. It had on a long white dress o' course, like all kids, but its head an' face was wrapped in a long, thick, kind of a veil that ol' Mis' Staggers wouldn't allow nobody to lift. The preacher says—

" 'If you will now remove the veil we will proceed.'

" 'I'll have my own child baptized in my own way,' she says sharp-like, 'er not at all. The veil stays put.'

" 'But my dear Mrs. Staggers,' says the soul-saver, 'she's got to have her head wet. How 'm I goin' to baptize her if I can't see her face?'

" 'How would you baptize her if she didn't have no head?' asks Mrs. Staggers. 'There ain't nothin' the matter with her *foot*,' she says. 'Put it on that.'

"An' he done it. It sure started some talk later but he done it an' so Fidelity Mutual was hoof-branded. They asked ol' Hiram about it one day an' he says:

" 'I don't see why you're so dad-blamed particular about namin' 'em on the head,' he says. 'Where do you name a ship?'

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"They wasn't sure fer a minute, ships bein' few an' far between in Clermont County, Ohio, at that time, barrin' gravy-boats on the dinner-table.

"It was when Fidelity Mutual was eight months old that I got into trouble with the Staggerses so's to pretty near sever diplomatic relations with the whole outfit. It was at another one of them——, I mean at one of them church festivals. This time it was a peach-pickin' contest. I mind I was drivin' Marybone Judkins over there that night. I was minded to ast her if she wouldn't be Mrs. Wilkes. There wasn't no reason why she shouldn't. There wasn't no responsibility attached to the job. I had nothin' an' she had nothin', but she couldn't see it that way.

"You take my advice an' never propose to a girl when you're drivin'—onless you're drivin' home. If she says 'No' then turn around an' drive home is some unpleasant. That's the way it was with us. Marybone she said she liked me—only she went further an' said she liked me same as a girl would like bein' scalped. That is, in a way of speakin' an' she told me that she didn't want to see me no more that evenin' till it was time to go home.

"That's all right. I didn't kick on that. I drove up the church-lot, helped Marybone out, hitched the horse an' went over to the bar that was in the next field where I took maybe a few horns-o'-plenty with some of the fellers. After a little bit I got tired an' went out to find some place to set down. Ol' Hiram Staggers with his wife come past me an' I heard her sayin'—

" 'Just wait then till I find a place to put Fidelity—so's she'll be quiet.' An' then they sa'nters off.

"I went on about my business feelin' mean an' nasty on account o' Marybone turnin' me down. Finally it struck me a heap that my buggy was a good place to set so I goes over there, pulls up the top an' jumps in. I hadn't any more'n lit on that seat before I heard a yell an' ol' Mis' Staggers runs up.

" 'Get out o' that, you murderer,' she yells. 'Get out o' that——'

"I says nothin' but lights my pipe an' sets back on the blanket that was rolled up on the seat.

"Believe me er not gentlemen she reached in that buggy same as I seen a old mountain-lion once stick a claw outen a cage an' ketch a passer-by an' she got a Texas grip on my pants. One of us had to come! Me er the pants; so I compromised.

" 'There! You dod-gasted human poultice,' she says. 'What do you mean by settin' on Fidelity Mutual's head? You murderer! I laid my baby on the seat o' your buggy to sleep,' she says, 'an' you, you big skinny, murderin' malefactor comes in an' plants your—your miserable anatomy smack on 'er face! Oh I could tear you limb from limb,' she says.

"She'd have done it too if it hadn't been fer a snake-fence that was between us a second later.

"I stood watchin' 'em fer a minute when ol' Hiram come up.

" 'She'll be lop-sided all 'er life,' she says, cryin'. 'Put your hand agin her head, Hiram Staggers, an' see if we can't push it back.'

"An' they stood there fer five minutes pushin' an' moldin' that kid's head like a child does with a piece o' chewin'-gum whiles I sneaked off to the bar across the lot.

"WELL fer two er three years everything went on quiet. The Staggerses made money an' saved it an' finally done the way all well-to-do farmers done in them days. As soon as they was well enough fixed to be able to afford it they rented the farm, bought a house in town an' moved in where they could get somebody to talk to.

"It was just after that that things began to happen. Jest note will you, that old Hiram was gettin' on in years about that time. I had left home some years before an' gone West an' the first thing about home that I heard was when I met Aleck Peters, who come out fer his lungs. He told me that the town was some upset by reason of a lot of fires that had broke out an' that nobody could account fer.

"First there was the Knights o' Pythias Hall, he says. She cost three thousand dollars an' not a cent of insurance—went up like a Indian smoke-dance. Man! But they was upset. Seems like they found a pile of old clothes an' a can of ile jammed into a closet in the cellar when they cleared up the ruins.

"Next come the Fire Company's engine-house. Seems funny that should go but they'd done a lot o' loose-ended talkin' about fire-bugs after the hall went up an' it always seemed to me that somebody done

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it a purpose to show 'em that nothin' was reelly safe when a good enterprisin' fire-bug made up his mind to get 'em.

"It was a year after that that I went home to look about a bit. I was takin' a lot o' cattle to Chicago an' I went a bit further an' took in the old town. There wasn't hardly a person I knowed till finally I ast some one where old Hiram Staggers lived an' they showed me his house down by the river bank. Ol' Misses Staggers was there an' she let me in and didn't hardly know me at first.

" 'Lan' o' Goshen,' she hollers, 'if it ain't little Johnny Wilkes growed up to man's estate. Where'd you come from an' what-'re you doin' fer a livin', Johnny?' she asks me.

"I told her an' we set an' talked an' I asks her about ol' Hiram an' the kids, an' she shuts up like the head of a snappin' turtle on a chicken foot.

" 'We have our troubles same as most people,' says Hiram. 'But we mustn't complain——'

" 'They tell me there's been a lot o' fires around here in the last three years,' I says, tryin' to strike a pleasant subject.

"Mis' Staggers began cryin' an' ol' Hiram pats her on the shoulder.

" 'There, ma,' he says. 'Johnny didn't mean nothin'. Did you Johnny?'

" 'How would I mean anything?' I asks him.

"I was plumb took aback by it all.

"Old Hiram shakes his head an' walks outen the room an', as ol' Mis' Staggers didn't come back, I took my sombrero an' left.

"They're all as crazy as a locoed horse, I thinks. But they don't have no loco-weed in Ohio, so I knowed it couldn't be that. Well I went back to the hotel an' set down. It was about ten o'clock at night by that time an' I hadn't any more'n lighted my second pipe when a awful yell goes up from outside.

"'Fire! Fire! Fire!' it said, an' then there was a rush of people down the street.

"I run out on the street an' it was sure jammed with the crowd.

" 'Where is it?' I asks the first man I run into—head on.

" 'Water Company's plant,' he says breathless. 'Come on.'

"I could never ketch him but I got there in time to see the last of the place go up an' then a crowd come around the corner swirlin' an' swingin' 'round a man who was hollerin' an' yellin'.

" 'Take him to the drug-store,' says a big man, pushin' his way through the crowd.

"He didn't need to raise his own feet. That crowd took him an' just naturally swept him into that drug-store like a dust storm across the jack-rabbit flats. I sa'ntered up in time to see the doctor go in. Presently he come out. It was old Doctor Hodson what I knowed as a boy.

" 'What's the matter with him, Doctor?' I asks.

" 'Why, hello, Johnny Wilkes,' he says. 'What're you doin' here?'

"I tells him and asks him again what's the matter."

" 'Matter!—Here!'

"He took me by the arm an' led me back to the room behind the store. There was a long table there and on that table they had laid out the man they took inside the store. He was as dead as Pharaoh Meneptha, King of Egypt. I looks at him astounded.

" 'He was all right when he come inside,' I says, wonderin'.

" 'He's better off where he is now,' says Doc Hodson. 'He's dead. He never had no chance.'

" 'What took him?' I asks. 'Was it a weak heart that couldn't stand the excitement.'

" 'It was partly that,' says doc, slow like, 'but—look here, John.'

"He opened the dead man's eyes and looked long into 'em an' turns away shakin' his head.

" 'I've heard of it,' he says. 'I've heard of it in my profession but I never seen it before.'

" 'What is it, Doc?' I asks him. 'Give it a name, man?'

"For answer he shut the door very slow and tight an' he turned on me like he was tellin' me somethin' that he was afeared to put in words.

" 'Johnny Wilkes,' he says low and stern, 'that man was scared to death. Look in his eyes and tell me what you see there.'

"Gentlemen, I looked an' doc looked again an presently he turned to me:

" 'This must never be told, John Wilkes,' he says. 'Personally I will never say a word about it. I put you on pledge now,'

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he says, 'that you will never tell what you seen. If any one asks you what you seen there what will you say, John Wilkes? Remember that you may some day have to answer to your Maker for what you say. Remember, if you are asked even in a court of law as to what killed this man, what will your answer be?'

" 'Nothin',' I says, an' he smiled a little bit an' turned away.

"Now I didn't connect this in no ways with any of the stories that Aleck Peters had told me the year before. Nor I didn't think about the other fires. I went back to the hotel an' went to bed an' I don't believe I'd been two hours in bed when there come such a roar of steam-whistles an' sireens goin', that I come out of bed standin', an' made a break fer the stairs to the office.

" 'What is it this time, Mose? Judgment Day?'

"Mose was the clerk an' was floppin' about like a hen with its head off.

" 'Might think so,' he grins. 'Sounds like it, but it ain't. It's Abraham's Asbestos Atelier. Seems like the fire started in the furnace-room an' spread. She's gone an' no hope of savin' anything. I reckon old Hiram Staggers 'll have to go to work now.'

" 'Why?' I asks him.

" 'He owned controllin' stock in it. They say the old feller's down by the creek half demented. Better go down there if you knowed him as well as people say.'

"I TOOK him at his word an' went down past the old lumber piles an' the tan-yard to a little narrer path behind the asbestos works. It was a new place to me, but Mose had told me where to find the place I was seekin'. There was just a little narrer footpath between the board fence an' the creek an' on that path as I come up, I seen a bent, stoopin' shape that looked like Grief in a black suit—if you know what I mean.

"It was ol' Hiram Staggers.

"I went up to him an' put my hand on his arm.

" 'I'm sorry Hiram,' I says. 'It's too bad about the fire—was most of your property invested in it?'

"He turned on me like a wounded rat turns and fair snapped at me:

" 'Fire? Fire? Property?' he says. 'What have I got to do with that, John Wilkes? It's almost a happy man I am this night—I'm not grievin',' he says. 'On'y —for—this——'

"He took me by the arm so hard it hurt an' whirled me over among the dry bushes to where a long shadow lay among the flowerin' dogwood bushes.

" 'Look,' he says. 'Look an' see what I believe is your handiwork, John Wilkes.'

"If the preacher had offered me a hooker o' hooch I couldn't have been more surprised. I follered him across the belt of the cold, white moonlight to the end of the shadder where he stopped me. There was a big beam there; it looked like a beam from the tail-gate of the flume where the sluice-gate stood. It looked like that an' under its twenty-inch butt lay a pore, little thing all wrapped in black with a great veil about the head. I looked but said nothin'. Old Hiram fair took the words from my lips:

" 'Look,' he shrieked. 'Look your fill, man, it's my only daughter—lyin' there. You should like it! You who done it!'

" 'Done what, you double-barreled idjit?'

"I didn't know till he put his hand on my arm, that I was yellin' at the top of my voice an' no wonder; it was enough to drive any one outen their right minds.

"He quieted right down an' spoke low an' gentle.

" 'I'm wrong,' he says. 'I take shame, John Wilkes, for what I've said but—listen and I'll tell you what's happened.'

" 'I expect you to,' I says, for I was mad at the old feller.

" 'How long do you think this matter of the fires is been goin' on?' he says.

" 'The Lord knows,' I shouts at him. 'How should I know?'

" 'Fifteen years now, John Wilkes,' he says. 'Time an' again as Fidelity Mutual growed up, we wondered at her queer ways. She was never like other girls. Of course she was barred from associatin' with them by reason of the veil. She was never without that,' he says. 'You know what it would have meant had we ever took that away from her.'

" 'Yes,' I says humorin' him. 'Of course —of course.'

" 'You've heard of it, then, have you?'

" 'Not till now,' I says, thinkin' was I goin' crazy, or was he?

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"Still I kept on hopin' maybe he'd give up the secret.

" 'Not till now? Then you kin never guess what her mother an' I have gone through with from the first day when we found that the big fire that near burned up the town was started by our own little daughter. Then we tried to watch her—twice we found matches in her hands. Of course we tried to teach her but we couldn't. There was nothin' to appeal to. She couldn't hear what we said! She couldn't speak! You know all about that—hey?'

" 'I ain't heard about it lately,' I says, feelin' of my head to see if it was still there. 'Tell me this, Hiram—I ain't no man to pry into other folks' personal affairs but—why in —— couldn't she hear er speak? Was she deef? An' dumb?'

"He looked at me like a child might look who'd saw a ghost.

" 'Oh, man, man! I see now that you ain't got the faintest idee,' he says. 'Come with me an' look at your handiwork.'

"An' before I could stop er run he drawed me across the shadder to where that little figger lay an' he laid hand to the veil.

" 'This,' he says solemn-like, 'is why this pore child was always cut off from associatin' with her kind. This is why the only two men who ever seen her with the veil lifted both died o' fright. Kin you stand it, John Wilkes, you who done it?'

" 'You've said twice now, Hiram Staggers, that this was my handiwork. What do you mean by that?'

"I reckon I was some short with him but I just couldn't help it. He had accused me twice an' I meant to see the end of it.

" 'I shouldn't have said that, John Wilkes,' he said, speakin' slow an' pickin' an' choosin' his words like they was eggs fer a settin' hen. 'Handiwork means work done by one's hands. This ain't your *handiwork* exactly but you done it just the same.'

" 'As how? Me? How did I do it?'

" 'I reckon you've forgot sech a little thing as settin' on a child's head at a picnic,' he says. 'That wouldn't count with *you* but that's what done it.'

"Man the sweat was startin' out on me like on a startled horse an' I was fair shiverin' with fright—an' that's a cold shiver.

" 'Come then.'

"An' before I had time to edge away he pulled me out in the moonlight and lifted the corner of the veil.

" 'Look,' he says, bitter and solemn. 'Look an' see, if you kin, what Heaven never intended to be seen by man.'

"I looked an', gentlemen, I hates to own it, but my soul turned to water; to salty, warm water that trickled down my hands an' oozed away at my fingers' ends.

"Gentlemen, *the girl had no face.*"

"How—?" The agent looked at Mr. Wilkes dazedly. "How—?" he began again.

"I asked Hiram Staggers," said Mr. Wilkes evenly. "But Hiram Staggers never spoke a sensible word again. I took him home, gibberin' an' fightin' the moonlight all the way an' me shiverin' an' scared an' we called up the doctor. I told him all about it an' he sat an' listened—after we had turned old Hiram over to the police.

" 'Yes, John,' says Doctor Hodson when I had told him all about it. 'I have knowed it a long time,' he says. 'Two men have lost their minds on seein' her an' one died outright. I have heard of such a thing before,' he says. 'Tales an' traditions of such things are occasionally heard of in my profession but I never seen one before—as I say,' he says, 'two men have lost their reason from just lookin' at her. If your intellec' had not been stronger an' more active than that of most men you'd been druv crazy,' he says.

" 'But, Doc,' I says—we was both whisperin'—'Doc—how in the world did it—could it happen—how could she live without a face? Where is it?'

" 'I ain't got a million dollars—where is *it?*'

" 'What?' I says fair dazed.

" 'The million dollars I ain't got,' he snapped at me. 'She just never had a face—that's all.'

" 'How kin a person live without a face?'

" 'How kin a person live without anything that he ain't got? I ain't got a million dollars an' you ain't got a goiter but we're both livin' all right without 'em,' he says. 'Same way with pore little Fidelity Mutual—she never had no face an' she didn't know she needed one.'

" 'But,' I says—I was bound to end the thing fer my brain was in a whirl—'but, Doc—how did it happen that she never had no face?'

"He turned on me, still speakin' slow an' solemn, like he was in church.

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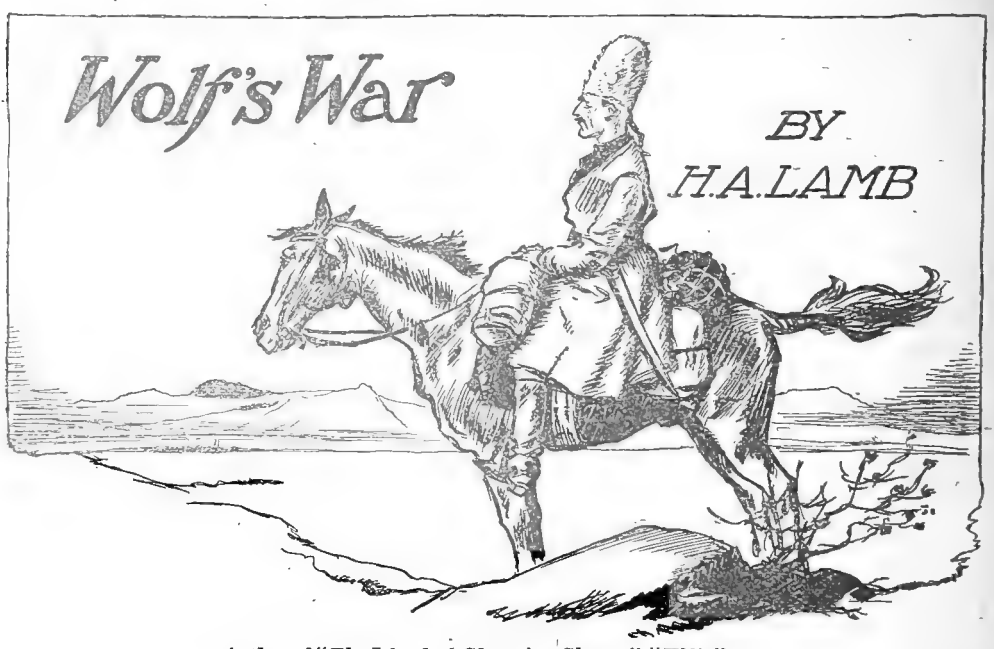
" 'That, my friend,' he says, 'is one of the thaumaturgical mysteries of the ages. After I began to investigate the case I asked Fidelity Mutual's mother about it an' all that she could say was that fer months before Fidelity Mutual was born, she dreamed every night about nothin'—just plain nothin'.' "

The agent started to speak but thought better of it and silently extended his flask to Mr. Wilkes across the well-curb.

Mr. Wilkes took it and tilted its bottom to the heavens.

"I shore am glad," he said politely as he returned it, "I shore am glad that I ain't like Fidelity Mutual."



Author of "The Island of Changing Shapes," "Khlit," etc.

KHLIT was angry. Very angry was Khlit, he surnamed the Wolf, and the Cossack of the Curved Saber by his enemies, Tatars and Turks. Khan Mirai Tkha would set extra watchmen about his herd of cattle at night, if word had come to him that Khlit was gripped so hard by the little devil of rage.

For no one in the Zaporozian Siech, the war encampment of the Cossacks along the bank of Father Dneiper, not even the *Kosheoi Ataman* himself, was better known to Khan Mirai Tkha than Khlit, the Wolf. And what the Tatar chief had learned, he had learned too late, to his cost, for it was the way of the Cossack to strike without warning. Wherefore Khan Mirai waited with patience for the time when Khlit should strike too soon or too late and the ancient score would be wiped out.

For no khan of the sixteenth century had more spear points at his call than Mirai Khan, great-grandson of the leader of the Golden Horde, not Yussaf himself, who was called prince of princes.

Now that Khlit's mustache was white and the muscles on his arm lean, the Cossack knew that the score between him and the Tatar had grown to the point where, on either side, it must be wiped out. Wherefore he was angry. For, against his wishes the entire body of the Zaporozian Siech had departed to fight the Poles to the west and with them had gone Menelitza, his foster-son who had come to the Siech to win place as a warrior.

The Poles, Khlit considered, were less worthy foes for Menelitza than the Tatars so when he was overruled by the atamans, he felt that it was a mistake the Siech would pay dear for, and for the first time

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he sulked at home when the Cossacks set out.

Another reason for his ill-temper was a woman. Menelitza, instead of winning knightly fame for the joy of good blows struck and received and the hot smell of battle, had told him that he planned to return an approved knight of the Siech to win a woman for wife. Women Khlit regarded as part of the baggage of Poles and Turks, useful otherwise in making and serving wine and in cooking food.

He had offered to get Menelitza a half dozen Tatar women to cook and prepare wine for him, but the boy had persisted in his plan to win a certain woman of a near-by village, one Alevna. When Khlit asked Menelitza, in deep sorrow, why he wanted a girl instead of himself, the Wolf, for comrade the boy could give no other reason than that Alevna had black hair and curling lips.

Wherefore was Khlit now sitting, to his deep disgust, on his horse at the threshold of the *sloboda* of Garniv, where Alevna lived. He had come to see with his own eyes what manner of person was Alevna, the black-haired beauty, and to satisfy his curiosity as to why Menelitza favored her, above six others.

It was doubly offensive to Khlit to seek out a woman, and to ask questions in a village where he was little known. But he set his sheepskin hat on the side of his head, lit his long-stemmed pipe, and, with his knee carelessly crossed in front of him, trotted into the village street. As he went, his gray eyes under shaggy brows searched out the women for a possible Alevna.

He drew rein before a group of girls chattering in front of a cottage, on the doors of which were painted pictures of the good saints driving devils into purgatory. This, Khlit judged, was the house of a worthy Christian. A slender, dark-haired girl in a blue dress with gold ornaments and a necklace of silver coins had already caught his eye.

She was not as large as her companions who had coarser features and rough hands—evidently maid-servants—but she ordered them about with great dignity, flashing a delighted smile as she did so, and pushing back her mass of black hair. She glanced long and curiously at the dusty Cossack sitting on his horse by the cottage gate.

"Which one of you, sparrows," said Khlit gruffly, "is the beauty, Alevna?"

The maids were silent with sheer surprise, but Alevna ran to the gate, opened it and confronted Khlit with flushed cheeks.

"Old man," she cried, stamping a booted foot, "are you blind with dust that you cannot see me?"

"I saw you," growled Khlit, puffing at his pipe. "Can you tell me which is Alevna, the black-haired beauty?"

The girl came near to the horse with knitted brows.

"What do you want of Alevna?" she asked angrily. "That is my name. I never saw you before, old man."

"You see me now, little wren," answered the Cossack. "I am the foster-father of Menelitza the young Cossack who swam the Dneiper to come to the Zaporozian Siech, and who desires you."

Alevna did not appear to take kindly to this speech which Khlit had taken pains to make mild and conciliatory because he wanted to watch the girl, not frighten her away.

"Then you are Khlit," she said quickly. "I know about you. The Cossacks went away and you stayed behind to sleep on your stove, for fear of the Poles. Or it may be just because you are old, and the young men are better fighters. Menelitza has chosen badly when he made you come wooing for him."

The Cossack's pipe slipped in his teeth from surprise. He, Khlit, to come wooing a girl for another man! He to be accused of sleeping when the Siech marched! But Alevna was taking revenge for his early remark. Warrior as he was, Khlit was not skilled in word battle, being content to let one word do the work of two.

"The women of the village are talking about you," continued Alevna, hopping on one foot in delight, "and they said how you talked against the *Koshevoi Ataman* himself when he ordered war against the Poles——"

"Bah!" Khlit's voice took a lower note. "The Poles are but meat for the swords of the Siech to sharpen upon. They are like sheep. The real foe of the Ukraine is there, across Father Dneiper."

Two dimples showed in Alevna's red cheeks.

"So that is why you sit in your house on the hill looking across Father Dneiper, old man, to see if you can find any enemies. That is all you are good for, now, isn't it—

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that and to come paying suit to young girls——"

A litter of laughter broke from the maids at the gate. Khlit shook his head like a wolf-hound that is bitten about the ears.

"My house on the hill has much booty in it," he growled, "from my enemies. And the Tatars know the name of Khlit so well they come not near it, though there is the ransom of ten *hetmans* inside."

"You need more than money, old man," said Alevna mockingly, as she stroked his horse's neck, "if you want to woo a girl, with your face. I had heard that Khlit was a mighty warrior. I am disappointed."

"Menelitza is strong," he said. "He desires you. What he desires he will get."

"Then it will be another wife," cried the girl. "I will not marry him!"

Khlit puffed thoughtfully at his pipe and leaned closer to her. His glance bored into the girl's brown eyes.

"Are you afraid of me, wren?" he asked.

"No," said Alevna seriously.

She advanced to the horse's side and placed both arms across the saddle bags, her smiling, fresh face within a foot of Khlit's shaggy countenance. Brown eyes peered into gray for the space of a minute. Khlit's hand shot out and closed firmly around the girl's white throat. Just a little, his fingers tightened. One of the maids screamed. But Alevna did not cease smiling.

"You are not afraid now?" questioned the Cossack. "I might kill you."

"No," she said.

She felt safe, being a woman and beautiful. Arrogantly she said—"Will you know Alevna now?"

Khlit dropped his hand and gathered up his reins.

"Yes," he said. "You have a snub nose."

Whereupon he trotted away up the village street, without a backward glance at the dark-haired beauty he had come ten miles to see.

THE passing of time did not assuage the anger of Khlit. Tales were brought to him at his cottage overlooking the banks of the Dneiper of how the army of the Siech fought the Poles, and old women did not scorn to mock at Khlit because he was not with the others.

To tell the truth Khlit did not much heed the tales of fighting on the Polish border. His thoughts lay in another direction, across the river. From childhood Khlit had heard tales of the Tatar Horde, of Nogai, grandson of Teval, seventh son of Juchi, leader of the Golden Horde.

He had seen towns laid in smoke and ruins from one end of the Ukraine to the other, when the Krim Tatars marched, and he knew how followers of the Great Turk incited the ever-ready horsemen of the East to try the strength of the Cossack armies. Year by year he had faced the flying hosts of swarthy horsemen who discharged clouds of arrows as they advanced or retreated and he had seen the ground covered with bodies of good Cossacks.

Such memories were not lightly forgotten, and Khlit waited at the door of his cottage, his eyes searching the river for what he knew would come—a sally of Tatar horsemen across into the Ukraine, in the absence of the Siech army. To get him food, he went to the river with a pronged spear and returned with fish which he baked in smoke and ate. Only at midday he slept and then, like his Tatar enemies, with one eye open.

It was during one of his midday naps that Khlit learned the news he had been waiting for, and expecting with the wise knowledge of a fisherman who is sure of his prey. He had not many visitors at the cottage, partly because he was wary about making friends, and partly because Cossack folk held him in some fear, wherefore they lost no chance to mock at him because he had not gone with the Siech.

So it happened that he was instantly alert when there was a patter of hoofs on the rough trail leading to his cottage, and a small, bent figure came into view mounted on one horse and leading another pack animal. By its gray cloak and wizened brown face, Khlit recognized the figure as that of Yemel, a Jewish merchant, who spoke all tongues and ordinarily haunted the path of the Siech, as full of news as a squirrel, news gleaned from Kiev to Tatary.

"Hail to you, Khlit," cried Yemel, climbing down from his horse and seating himself on the tree trunk beside the Cossack. "I have some rare gold ornaments taken from the Polish towns by our brave Cossacks. Perchance, noble sir, you would like to exchange some trifling things for them."

Yemel rambled on describing his goods,

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his bright little eyes attentive on the Cossack's impassive face, and throwing out occasional hints that he was thirsty and corn brandy was excellent to the taste. Khlit motioned to the hut, whereupon the Jew jumped up spryly, and reappeared with a full beaker of brandy, at the same time wiping his lips. Khlit did not fail to debit Yemel with two beakers instead of one, but he said nothing until his guest had done refreshing himself.

"A fox does not play tricks without reason, Yemel," he said finally. "Full well you know I trade not in spoil, which I take by the sword. In your jackal brain there is something you would tell—or barter, I care not—so, Yemel, speak or begone."

"Aye, noble sir," chirped the merchant, his eye brightened by the drink, "as always, your words are the very coinage of pure gold in their wisdom. You might add that the jackal does not come to the lion's den without reason. Honor me with your attention, *bogatyr*, for Yemel scorned to believe what he heard in the villages, that Khlit, he of the Curved Sword, the Wolf, had stayed behind to sleep when the Siech——"

"Enough!" said Khlit impatiently. "You have news?"

"For your ear alone, Khlit," admitted Yemel, "for we two are wiser than the whole Zaporozian Siech."

"Spawn of the devil," said Khlit mildly, "do you link your name with a Cossack? Is your blood the same as mine?"

"Nay, Khlit," broke in the merchant hurriedly, "I said not that. Do not believe that of me, noble sir. I meant that my word was for the ear of one wiser than all the Siech. Just a little moment and I will tell it. Khan Mirai Tkha has gone upon a hunt."

Khlit's gaze flickered over the Dneiper and back to Yemel.

"The Khan, who loves the chase of the stag," continued Yemel, "has taken many horsemen as beaters and crossed the Dneiper in his hunt. Truly, it has been a great take, for I have come this day from the spot where the stag was found. Khan Mirai is a great hunter."

"Aye," said the Cossack.

"He hunted the stag into the streets of Garniv, just across the river," explained the merchant. "And his horsemen who were beaters surrounded the village. It is a pity that the Zaporozian Siech wars against the Poles, for Khan Mirai hunted well."

"Were many slain?" queried Khlit.

"All. I saw the scalp-locked bodies of Cossacks strewing the street like fish in the bed of a brook which has run dry. Khan Mirai has returned across the river with many slaves and much booty."

"Aye, he is a good hunter." Khlit bethought him for a moment. "What of Alevna, she who was the beauty of Garniv, the black-haired one? Was she among the slain?"

"Nay, Khlit, Alevna is missing. They say she was among the slaves, being beautiful, in spite of her temper. What a pity!" Yemel shot a calculating glance at Khlit. "The news of the Khan's great hunt is not as old as the sun today. Truly, I hurried here with the tidings, for I said to myself that Khlit should hear. It has cost me much trade, for you will not barter, only give. They say you are more generous than Yussaf, prince of princes——"

"Peace!" muttered Khlit, impatiently. Jerking his thumb over his shoulder, he added, "Go to the hut for reward, Yemel. Select one thing. If it be too fine I will take it from you and rip your hide for payment. If it be too little you will cheat yourself. Choose!"

Rid of the chattering merchant, Khlit knitted his brows in thought. The coming of Khan Mirai did not surprise him. He had been looking for it. It irked him that he had not seen the Tatars cross, even ten miles down the river. For them to escape unfollowed was to Khlit a sin of the first magnitude. Yet, with the army away, who was there to follow into the land of the Horde after the swift horsemen of the Mirai tribe?

Another thing Khlit meditated. The Tatars had taken Alevna, the woman who had come between Menelitza, his foster-son and himself. Well, and good, he thought. A woman always bred trouble, and Alevna he had read as a great mischief-maker. Now he was well rid of her.

With Alevna disposed of, Menelitza would return to his cot in Khlit's hut and eat and drink and fight as a Cossack should. But—Khlit shook his head—suppose Menelitza became very angry when he learned that the girl was gone? Young men were unreasonable as wild horses. Menelitza

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might even go so far as to blame him, Khlit, for the loss of the girl.

Khlit filled his pipe and considered the question with great care. It was true that his foster-son would be saddened by the news from Garniv, as he had joined the Siech to win knightly fame so that he could claim Alevna for wife. It was, furthermore, quite possible that Menelitza would try to go after the Tatars when he returned, which would be dangerous, as well as useless, it being then too late. Alevna was desired of Menelitza. She was, in a way, his property.

That being the case, Khan Mirai had despoiled Menelitza of something he coveted which was the same as saying that he had despoiled Khlit. Which was not to be permitted. Would the women begin saying that Khlit had been robbed by the Tatars and had slept in his hut like a swine-tender? There was no telling what Menelitza would say when he got back.

At this point in the Cossack's meditations, Yemel emerged from the hut, having been inside a full hour. The merchant's face was wet with excitement. In one hand he held a Turkish scimitar with jewelled hilt and chased-gold scabbard. In the other was a silver beaker with an emerald of considerable size set in the handle.

Khlit looked up and scowled.

"Hey, dog," he growled, "said I not *one* thing, and you have two? Do you love your skin so little you would try to cheat me?"

"Hearken but a moment, noble sir," whined Yemel, clutching his treasures. "You did tell me to fetch one thing, but if it was too much I could have nothing. So, to make sure of pleasing you, I brought two things, one little and one big, to allow you to select my reward. If the sword is too much, I will take the small beaker, and begone."

"Then the sword is more valuable than the beaker?" inquired the Cossack thoughtfully.

"Assuredly, noble sir," Yemel cried. "You can see its pure gold and fine jewels for yourself. It is too great a gift, I fear, even for your munificence. Of a truth, I did wrong to bring it. I must take the beaker."

"Nay," returned Khlit, "you can have either. Did I not promise? Throw down the one you do not want. At once, dog!" Yemel's agitated eyes traveled from sword to beaker and back again. He gripped both for an instant. Then he flung down the sword, clutching the beaker to his breast. A smile twitched Khlit's gray mustache.

"You lied, Yemel," he growled. "For the jewel in the beaker is worth two swords, and you were not blind. However, I have a mind to deal lightly with you. Take the beaker. You might have had thrice its value, for there are other emeralds within. Hey, come with me to the Tatar camp, and you shall have ten times its worth."

A wail broke from the merchant at this news, silenced by a wave of the Cossack's hand. Gathering up the gold sword, Khlit went into the hut. Yemel watched him with the despairing eyes of one who was punished beyond his deserts.

The merchant had gone, and the sun was low in the west when Khlit again emerged from the cottage. This time he was dressed in red morocco boots, long *svitka* or coat, a wide leather belt from which his sword hung together with gold tassels, and a high, sheepskin hat, from the back of which his gray scalplock reached to his shoulders.

He went directly to the stable behind the hut, saddled and bridled his horse, filled his saddlebags with meal-cakes and tobacco, and sprang on his horse. For a moment he searched the river with his glance, and then urged his horse forward in the direction taken by Khan Mirai.

NEXT day's sun saw Khlit riding steadily along the steppe on the trail of the riders of Mirai. The level plain, covered with lush grass and with only occasional ravines where trees and undergrowth offered shelter, was not a favorable place for concealment. What there was, Khlit made the most of with customary caution, for he was already far into the country of the Horde where a captured Cossack was a dead Cossack.

For various reasons the old warrior had come alone on his quest to gain Alevna. There were few Cossacks left in the villages. The pick of the fighters were in Poland. And Khlit was not the man to encumber himself with clumsy assistants. Likewise, it would have been impossible for many men to travel unseen across the steppe, and such

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force as he could have mustered would have been too small to encounter the full strength of Khan Mirai's thousands.

Khlit knew from experience that the Tatars were dangerous foes, wary, swift to act, and more merciless even than the Cossacks themselves. The Horde were roaming folk, carrying their houses with them on wagons and going from place to place to obtain good grazing for their herds of cattle and horses.

Yet, if he had considered his quest impossible, Khlit would not be where he was now. His ability to think clearly into the future had kept Khlit alive until his hair was gray, when few Cossacks lived to middle-age.

Khlit, reasoning coolly, saw that he had certain advantages. He knew the land of the Horde from previous forays after cattle and horses. He was familiar with the Tatar way of fighting which was deadly to strangers. Also, Mirai's men had a wholesome respect for the name of the Wolf. And they did not suspect he was following them.

Although he had been riding fast, Khlit had seen nothing of the Tatars by midday. The steppe appeared deserted, except for the deer and hare that fled at the sound of his approach. When the midday sun beat down on him, Khlit slipped from his horse, leading the animal into a grove of oaks that bordered the trail he was following. He seated himself on the turf, took some meal-cakes and dried fruit from his saddlebags and prepared to eat his first meal of the day.

He had scarcely set his teeth into the first cake, when he knew that he was no longer alone on the steppe. Further along the trail a horse whinnied. At the first sound Khlit sprang to his own animal and wound his neckcloth about the beast's nostrils lest it should make answer to the newcomer. Then he trotted to the edge of the grove to get a view of the stranger.

Khlit had not seen a Tatar for some years, but he did not mistake the lithe figure seated easily on a steppe pony trotting down the trail. The man's swarthy face peered out under his pointed helmet. A cloak was thrown loosely over his coat of mail, a quiver of arrows at his back, his bow in a case at the saddle.

Evidently the Tatar was not suspicious of enemies, for he was singing a low, chuckling song, glancing occasionally to right and left, more from force of habit than watchfulness. Khlit crouched in his cover and scanned every movement of the rider.

The latter's course took him to within a few yards of the oak trees, and he went by with a careless glance into the grove. Khlit did not move until the Tatar was well past his retreat. It was his first sight of prey in many months and his nostrils opened eagerly, while his gray eyes narrowed.

When Khlit did move, he lost no time. Trotting out, very quietly for a man of his size, into the trail, he covered the distance between him and the rider. As the latter startled by some sound, or glimpse of a moving shadow beside him, turned in his saddle, Khlit's arms closed around him in a crushing grip that the Tatar strove in vain to break.

The Cossack had caught his enemy's lasso from the saddle as he grasped him, and when the two fell to earth Khlit made quick work of binding the smaller man securely, pinioning his arms to his side.

"Eh, Flat-Face," he grunted, standing upright and adjusting his coat, "a sword is needless when a fool rides recklessly over the steppe. You are a nasty-looking villain. I think I may slay you after all."

The Tatar made no move, his small eyes fixed intently on Khlit's every movement. The latter crossed his arms and stared down at the bound man thoughtfully.

"Hey," he said, "I need a messenger to the great Khan Mirai. You know what I'm saying, devil take you, in spite of your rude stare. Tell Khan Mirai that Khlit, he called the Wolf, the Cossack of the Curved Saber, is following the trail of the Horde, and he will not leave until the Khan presents him with a gift. A gift of the girl Alevna, taken from the village of Garniv. Tell your leader if he does not hand over the girl, the Wolf will bring death and wo upon the tribe. Aye, great wo."

He assisted the man to his feet and helped him into the saddle, first carefully removing sword, bow and arrows.

"Bring back your answer to me here, Flat-Face," added Khlit. "And think not of treachery against the Wolf, or you will do little more thinking."

Khlit struck the horse on the flank, and the beast started quickly back along the trail. The Cossack watched it for a moment, then took a meal-cake from his pocket and began his interrupted repast. He did

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not sit upon the turf, however, for he led his horse out to the trail and trotted after the Tatar.

Khlit had had time to eat many meals, and he had, in fact, smoked many pipes, by the time that the other appeared again. This time the Cossack had staged his welcome in a different spot, some two miles nearer the Tatar camp. He had selected a place near the trail where he had a good view of whoever might return, and at the same time be safe from observation himself. A turn in the trail, around some rocks screened him.

He saw the Tatar making his way along the steppe alone, but his glance was fixed on the distance, not on his late foe. Apparently the man came unaccompanied, but Khlit was not one to believe in the good faith of any one until convinced by his five senses. Which was fortunate, for as the Tatar was nearly abreast of him, the Cossack made out several helmets and spear points coming up the trail a good distance in the rear.

It needed no second sight to convince him that other riders were following their friend with no good intentions toward him—Khlit—and, as before, he acted swiftly.

As before, he let the Tatar pass by him a short distance, when he wheeled his horse from cover and sprang after him. The unfortunate rider heard the hoof beat, and turned his horse with the quick skill of his race, feeling in the quiver at his back for an arrow.

But Khlit had not misjudged his distance. As the Tatar fitted arrow to bow, the Cossack's horse struck him, and dashed his own horse to the ground at the same instant Khlit's heavy sword found his head. Horse and rider alike were cast to earth, and the Cossack wheeled away from the trail with a flourish of his curved sword.

"Hey, that was good, very good," he chuckled to himself, as he put several miles of steppe between him and the spot where the Tatar lay, "now Khan Mirai will know that the Wolf is following him, and that the Wolf is Khlit."

THE heart of Khan Mirai Tkha, great-grandson of Juchi, leader of the Golden Horde, was not light within him in spite of his successful raid on the Cossacks across the Dnieper. He sat in the sun, his legs crossed under him, his armor laid aside, stroking his black mustache and gazing moodily about the camp of the tribe.

There were many reasons why Khan Mirai should have been care-free, for he had rejoined the main encampment of the tribe with booty and slaves. The host of Mirza Uztei-Kur, which the Khan was honoring with his presence, was located in a grassy basin, a mile or so in extent, surrounded by a ring of wooded hills.

Nothing better in the way of an encampment could have been desired. And the Khan's own quarters, the leather and silk pavilion mounted on a wagon drawn by fifty horses was richly furnished with Mongol draperies and Persian rugs.

But there was a thorn in Khan Mirai's side—Khlit, the Cossack Wolf, who had followed his riders from the Dnieper far into the land of the Horde, past the Kartan Mountains where no Cossack had set foot before, was still in the vicinity and in spite of every stratagem the iniquitous brain of Khan Mirai could hit upon, Khlit was still unharmed. And he had set his mark upon the Tatars.

Wherefore, it would not need a *shaman*, or conjurer, to tell that the Khan was irked. For a Tatar lives by mares' milk and flesh, and by fighting, and the Khan was visiting one of his subject tribes who looked to him to deal with the Cossack pest.

To add to his discomfort, that morning when he stepped from his pavilion, he had seen seven crows fly across the encampment, and heard their croaking. Khan Mirai knew by this that some misfortune was not far away. It might be possible to ward off the misfortune by aid of the tribe *shaman*. If this impending misfortune were in any way connected with Khlit, it should be dealt with at once, by all the skill of the conjurer and the intelligence of the Khan, with Mirza Uztei-Kur.

The Khan saw the squat figure of the *mirza* approaching him and made room on the wagon step for the leader of the tribe.

Uztei-Kur was more at ease on a horse's back than on his bow legs. He stood perhaps five feet in height, with heavy shoulders, a face broad and yellow as a full moon, and slanting beads for eyes. Unlike the Khan, Uztei-Kur was in mail and bore his scimitar. Men said he slept thus.

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He did not greet his chief, merely pulling out a pipe which he filled from the Khan's tobacco-jar. A pitcher of soured mare's milk had made up the other's breakfast, and this Uztei-Kur emptied with several gulping swallows. Both were silent for a space, waiting for the other to speak.

"Have you news of the Wolf?" asked Khan Mirai at length, speaking what was on his mind.

"Aye," muttered Uztei-Kur between his lips. "Yesterday we had news of Khlit who calls himself the Wolf. Truly, he was bred of the devil's jackal. It was when we chased a stag in the woods to the west. As we passed under the brow of a cliff a heavy rock bounded down. Two were crushed and another had his backbone cracked, so we left him to die. The stag escaped us."

"Did you see Khlit?" queried the Khan.

"Nay, who else could it be?" demanded Uztei-Kur, baring his teeth which were pointed as a jackal's.

His eye wandered over the crowded encampment and came to rest on his companion.

"Khlit is hanging around until he gets the woman he asked for. I have seen her. She is worthless to us, for she has the temper of a serpent, and the fury of a tiger. None can touch her. Why not give Khlit what he wants and get rid of him?"

"Heart of a lizard!" Khan Mirai spat into the dust at his feet. "Know you not that Khlit is worth a hundred Alevna's to us? Make him a slave and we can taunt the Cossacks without measure. He is a prize worth the sack of Garniv."

"Then hunt him down," growled the *mirza* whose mind could hold only one idea at once. "And call me not a lizard, Khan Mirai, if you would not find a lizard can sting. I have hunted Khlit for days, without finding more than his horse's dung. Consult your *shaman* whom you love as a camel loves a spring, and learn how you may snare the Wolf."

The Khan puffed at his pipe. He was not of Tatar blood alone. He came of Mongol ancestors, and had the tall body and slit eyes of his kind. The *mirza*, he looked on as a dog, to be whipped to obedience, who knew and cared nothing for the high arts of the conjurer or the sacred books that had been part of the treasury of the Golden Horde.

"Today," he said, not without hesitation, "I saw seven crows fly over the tribe. And I have heard that yesterday the *shaman* walked alone in the woods as he does when a battle is near. But what battle can come to pass here? And now the *shaman* wears his mask, another sign that he is distrubed."

"Aye," said Uztei-Kur without emotion, "the double-faced one sulks in his house today."

"He can tell us," decided the Khan, rising to his feet, "whether it will be possible to trap the Wolf. If so, we shall ask him how, and out of his wisdom which is allied to unseen potencies, he will announce a trap. If he declares that the oracle believes we can not trap the Wolf, then will we give up the girl, perhaps. But the *shaman* is very wise. He will devise a trap."

Khan Mirai caused it to be known in the camp that they were going to consult the conjurer, and should be undisturbed. The Tatars were not inclined to disobey the command, for they held the conjurer in wholesome fear, and for the last day he had sulked and spoken to no one, besides wearing his mask, which was a bad omen.

Threading through sleeping camels the two leaders came to the wagon-house of the man they sought, in a cleared space near one side of the camp. The pavilion was like the others, save for a narrow opening at the dome-shaped top and curious engravings around the leather sides, representing forms of animals and birds, with many crows.

Truly, Khan Mirai discovered, the *shaman* was sulking. For he called for many minutes at the entrance before the conjurer emerged, wrapped from head to foot in a red cloak, and wearing his mask.

ALTHOUGH Khan Mirai had consulted the conjurer many times before he never lost a feeling of awe when he stood before the dark entrance to the house where so many strange images were hung from the walls. The wizard himself impressed the Khan, for he was a wizened little man, scarce as high as the Tatar leader, although the latter was standing on a lower step. A peculiar smell, like that of dried poppies crept into his nostrils and he turned his eyes away as the figure in the red cloak bent its mask in the likeness of a dog's head upon him.

When he had made known his business and received the grudging assent of the

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shaman to enter, Khan Mirai stepped inside with Uztei-Kur, and, groping his way through the blackness seated himself cross-legged upon some antelope skins.

"Tell us what we have come to know, *Shaman*," he said, "concerning the Wolf, and you shall have *sequins* of gold to buy herbs and stag's antlers."

The *shaman* gave vent to a curious chuckling sound at these tidings, and for a space moved about in the darkness—for he had closed the leather flap over the door—making his preparations for the coming oracle.

Abruptly, he jerked the flap from the vent at the top of the pavilion, allowing a ray of sunlight to descend into the center of the house. In this light he stood revealed in all his conjuring attire. He wore his dog's mask, but the red cloak was discarded, and a myriad of iron figures hung from his body. Iron snakes twined down his legs, iron horses in miniature hung from his arms, with tigers, jackals, birds and fishes.

The cascade of little images covered him completely, and every move he made was accompanied by a loud clanking. In one hand he held a stock. Before him was placed a wooden drum.

Khan Mirai looked on with satisfaction and not a little awe, as at something he was accustomed to, yet not entirely at ease. The *mirza* had drawn back into the shadows. Slowly at first, then more rapidly the *shaman* began his ritual, every move being followed closely by the Khan.

With his wooden stick the conjurer beat methodically on the drum, facing first toward a huge pair of stag's antlers on one side of the house, then toward an elephant's head mounted in some fashion and stuffed into lifelike semblance, and then toward a serpent, similarly mounted, dimly to be seen in the semidarkness.

As he proceeded, the cadence of blows on the drum became quicker, the *shaman* struck up a dance in which his iron cloak rattled and clanked, and accompanied himself with a muttered shricking, looking now toward the vent in the top of the house. More and more rapidly he danced, wielding his drumstick and shrieking with the full strength of his lungs. As he did so, the Khan leaned forward breathlessly, his eyes fixed on the ridgepole which was visible through the opening.

When the clamor was at its utmost, the *shaman* suddenly whirled with a loud cry, and pointed to the opening at the top of the house. The Khan sprang to his feet, and as he did so the conjurer fell to the floor and lay motionless beside the drum.

"Did you see?" whispered Khan Mirai to the *mirza*. "The crow came and sat on the ridgepole. Never have I seen the *shaman* in such ecstasy. The prophecy will be, without doubt, more wonderful than ever."

"For twenty Summers," returned Uztei-Kur disdainfully, "I have sat in the gloom and watched, and I have never seen any crow alight on the ridgepole. If it is indeed the great-grandfather of the ravens——"

"Hush," whispered the Khan, "the *shaman* is returning to consciousness. It has taken only a moment for the message to reach him."

Both men were silent as the conjurer stirred, moved his arms, and sat up. Crouching on his haunches, he drew his red cloak about him, and stared at them from behind the dog's mask.

"I have heard," he cried in a hoarse voice, "the words of the raven that has given of wisdom—to the first Khans of the hinterland—to the great Genghis Khan—to Kublai Khan, lord of mountains—to Yussaf, prince of princes, from whom it came to the camp of Khan Mirai Tkha, great-grandson of Juchi, leader of the Golden Horde, at his summons. In my ears poured the widsom greater than the locked books of the treasury of Pam, more just than the words of the Dalai Llama, he of the mountains."

The conjurer stretched his hands before him as if clutching some imaginary object.

"The wisdom concerned the Wolf who follows the track of the Khan—it tells of a trap that may be set. This is the wisdom—the Wolf is cunning, but he is vain of his strength—Mirai Khan may go alone to where the rock fell from the mountain and seek for the slain stag. He will find the Wolf by the stag. He can tempt the Wolf into a trap. Out of his pride, the Wolf will come, and Tatar eyes shall see the Wolf ride into the encampment of Mirai Khan."

NOW Mirai Khan, although he, like most of his people held the *shaman* in awe, was no fool, or he would not have been leader of the Tatar riders. After turning over the words of

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the conjurer in his mind, he decided that after such a successful trance, the message of the raven must be unusually pregnant, wherefore it behooved him to follow the given advice, as his father and father's father had done before him.

Yet because he was wary, he went to the spot Uztei-Kur named to him, where the rock had fallen from the cliff, mounted and armed. And he went stealthily, approaching through the woods, not from the plain, at a walk, eyes and ears alert for sign of danger. For the *shaman* had said he would find Khlit, by the stag.

He found time to wonder, as he went, why the stag should be lying in the wood. For Uztei-Kur had said plainly that the deer had escaped him. Khan Mirai was aware, however, that it pleased the *shaman* to cloak the wisdom of his words in riddles. He was prepared to find something else at the spot.

But he was not prepared to find the body of a dead Tatar, stiff in the grass, for he had forgotten what Uztei-Kur said, that one of the hunters had been crippled by the rock and left to die. By the body he halted warily, for he saw the rock, a boulder about the height of a short man's belt. For many minutes Khan Mirai did not move. His gaze went from the body to the underbrush about him, and a frown gathered on his swarthy brows.

His keen ears had caught the sound of movement near him in the wood, just where he could not tell. Something was approaching, and the sound told him that the approach was gradual and quiet, not the careless trampling of a deer or wild horse. Khan Mirai reached back into his quiver, fitted arrow to bow, drew his small target over his left arm and waited for the sound to materialize into view.

He had half expected it, yet he gave a soft grunt of surprise when a horse and rider pushed quickly through the undergrowth into the clear space by the boulder, and Khlit confronted him. The Cossack lounged in his saddle, as he guided his mount to within a few paces of the Tatar. In one hand he held a pistol, of Turkish design.

Khan Mirai had last seen Khlit when the Tatars tossed him bound into a tent to await torture at their pleasure, many years ago. Khlit had escaped then, because a reckless Cossack had ridden through the camp with another horse, at night, and released him, at the cost of his own life.

The Cossacks were surely devils, thought Khan Mirai, for they cared not for their lives in battle. Khlit was older now, but the Tatar did not mistake his scarred face and broad, erect figure.

Neither spoke, for to do so would be to give the other advantage. The Tatar had his bow bent and ready, but Khlit's pistol was drawn. The weapon might miss fire, but then the arrow might also miss its mark and Khan Mirai was in no mind to meet the onset of the Russian's heavy steel and whirling saber. So either measured the other in silence, while their mounts pawed the turf and strove to get their muzzles down to the grass.

It was Khlit who broke the silence.

"If you have come to count your dead, Mirai Khan," he growled, "the carrion lies at your feet."

The Tatar did not move his gaze.

"I came, Khlit," he said, "to look for a stag that was slain in a hunt. Have you seen one?"

"Aye," said Khlit grimly. "Here at your feet. Two others were slain at the same time. It is a good hunt. Does it please you? Every day some of the hunted do not return to camp. For I, Khlit, am the hunter."

"Your death will be the price of the hunt, Khlit," returned Khan Mirai. "If not today, very soon. A prophecy has been uttered, that I would find you here, and that you shall be brought to the encampment. The first part has come true, soon the other will be true."

"Who spoke the prophecy?" asked Khlit with interest.

"A *shaman*, in holy convulsions. His words are truth, oh, *caphar*, more true than an oath you swear on that little gold ornament you carry."

The Cossack knew Khan Mirai referred to the cross he wore around his neck.

"Was not my promise true also," he asked. "Eh, that death should sting the tribe like a wasp, if the girl were not given back to me?"

The Tatar scowled.

"Why is Khlit, he of the Curved Saber, eager to gain a woman," he said contemptuously. "The girl is scarce grown, and with a temper like a vixen."

"Hearken, Khan Mirai," said Khlit, "the

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woman is not for me. Years ago when you had bound me, a Cossack rode through your camp and loosed me, being slain in the doing. His son I have made my son. And his son desires the girl Alevna for wife. Wherefore I have come for her, to pay the debt I owe."

Khan Mirai considered these words and saw a light. Verily, the *shaman* was potent beyond all foreseeing. For he had told the Tatar that Khlit might be tricked through his pride. And here was the solution.

Khlit, so reasoned the Tatar, was under blood-debt to free the girl. So closely was Alevna guarded in one of the wooden houses —none except the Khan and her guards knew which—that it would not be possible to rescue her, even if Khlit were able to gain the camp. So Khlit, failing to terrify him, Khan Mirai, must buy her at a price, and that price should be himself. Gladly would the Tatar surrender a thousand Alevnas to see the Cossack bound before him.

"So you have come to pay a debt, Khlit?" he asked, watching the Cossack narrowly. "Good! I swear to you that there is but one price that will buy Alevna. If you would clear your debt, you must buy the girl with yourself. Do that, and Alevna shall choose a horse and ride free into the steppe."

Khlit considered this with bent brows.

"The debt must be paid," he said. "But I do not trust you. When I see with my own eyes Alevna ride free into the steppe and none follow her, I shall be ready to say that you will receive your price—he hesitated only for a moment—"and then I will ride into the encampment in the plain. This is how it may be done.

"Soon, I shall light two fires on the hills to the west. When you see two smokes arise late in the afternoon give Alevna a good horse. I shall watch her go from the camp past the hill out to the steppe and lose herself to view. Think not to trick me. Then, before the sun kisses earth and the Blackbird Night flies over us, I will ride into your camp, as the father of Menelitza rode when he lost his life."

The Tatar studied his foe.

"Do you swear that on the gold token?" he asked finally.

Khlit held up the miniature cross in his left hand.

"I swear it," he growled. "Devil take it, when did Khlit break his word?"

Khan Mirai knew that the Cossack's promise was better than other men's. Moreover *caphars* did not lightly, strange as it seemed, perjure themselves when they swore an oath on their token. When the Tatar remembered the prophecy of the *shaman* he felt elated. The conjurer had sworn that Khlit would ride into the camp. Had not the first part of the prophecy come true?

Yes, Khan Mirai thought that the dice of the gods were falling as he wished. To part with the girl was a slight price to pay for the chance—the probability—that Khlit would do as he promised. Of course the Cossack might come galloping with drawn sword. Khan Mirai expected this. But he would be overpowered. The thought of Khlit bound before him settled the question.

"It shall be as you say," he snarled, his eyes alight. "I shall look for the smoke."

"Aye," said Khlit, "so be it."

The parting of the two warriors was not lightly accomplished. Each urged his horse slowly backward, watching the other. It was not until they were a good bowshot apart that Khlit wheeled his mount and disappeared into the wood that had sheltered him so long from the eyes of the Tatar riders.

Khan Mirai lost no time in leaving the spot, with a last glance at the dead man, and hastened to present a gift of gold to the *shaman*, who, as he expected, was still lying in the wooden house after his convulsions, which must have been severe, as two prophecies had been made, and each had come true.

WHEN the two columns of smoke rose from the western hill and drifted with the wind over the camp, Khlit watched a girl's form ride past in the distance.

His eyes were keen, and he could not mistake the figure on an Arab mount, whose poise and movements were those of Alevna. Even the tilt of her dark head he recognized, as she looked back at the Tatar camp, and the eager flush of her cheek when she saw freedom before her.

Khan Mirai had kept his promise. Now he would expect Khlit to keep his word.

But Khlit was in no hurry. He watched Alevna until the girl disappeared down a ravine. He scrutinized idly the herds of cattle which were grazing near the foot of the hill between him and the camp. He

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even tried to count the horses which he saw wandering about the plain riderless, their manes whipping in the brisk wind, their heads lifting alertly at the slightest sound.

The scene was pleasant, revealed by the level rays of the sun, sinking over the steppe to the west. Khlit considered it with appreciation, stroking his gray mustache. It had been several days since he had talked with Khan Mirai and he reflected that the Tatar was probably impatient at the delay. But Khlit was not to be hurried. He had not lit the fire until he was ready.

Now he scanned the smoke thoughtfully as it floated over the plain, dwindling to a narrow thread, and then vanishing. The lives of men, he mused, were like smoke, gathering size and strength at first, then fading rapidly. Like smoke, they drifted where the wind blew, until there was no wind.

There was nothing to prevent Khlit from mounting his horse and riding away in security back to the steppe, to the banks of Father Dnieper and Russia. The path was open. Night was coming on, and the dark would conceal his flight. Yet he stayed.

Menelitza's father, Khlit reflected had shared bread and salt and wine with him. Nay, he had shed his blood for him. And the opportunity was offered now to pay back the debt. Khlit did not bother to wonder whether Menelitza's father would know of it. It was sufficient that the debt could be paid.

The words of the *shaman* were true, although Khlit had not wasted a thought on them. The pride of the Wolf would lead him into the Tatar camp. His pride was such that he could not give the Khan the chance to say that he, Khlit, had turned his back upon a foe and broken his word. Yet, Khlit mused, the *shaman* had said nothing about the cunning of the Wolf. At least he had heard Khan Mirai say nothing of it. And that cunning was very great.

The sun had almost touched the earth, and Khlit rose and stretched himself as a dog does, first one foot then the other. He loosed his saber in its scabbard. Stopping for a moment to light his pipe, he went to his horse and very carefully ran his hand over saddle and bridle, feeling for any weakness. The horse, fat and strong from good feeding, whinnied and touched his shoulder with its muzzle. Then Khlit returned to the fire.

For the last time he cast a keen glance over the plain. The camp of the Tatars appeared as usual, but the Cossack noted bodies of horsemen darting about here and there, and others among the camels and wagons. All the Tatars except a handful of horse-tenders were near the encampment. Khlit noticed this preparation for his reception without emotion. He had not expected Khan Mirai to do otherwise. Then Khlit acted.

Stooping over the fires, he caught up a half dozen kindled sticks and sprang to his horse. The animal snorted and reared at the flame, but Khlit gained its back, and by hand and knee urged it down the slope of the hill, riding swiftly between the trees. In both hands he held the brands.

The horse needed no further urging than the smoke at his ears to stretch into a frantic gallop, and at that pace Khlit slipped from between the trees to the surface of the plain a half mile from the camp.

With the wind whipping his *svitza* about him, Khlit guided his mount on a course along the edge of the wood, which took him parallel to the camp. As he went, he dropped his smouldering brands into patches of the dry, waist-high steppe grass and watched the wind fan the spots into widening circles of black, out of which smoke poured up and tongues of flame shot.

He was unmolested in his course for the few horse-tenders had drawn near the camp, loath to miss the spectacle of the Cossack's arrival in the camp.

Dropping the last of his brands, Khlit wheeled his horse straight for the herd of cattle which already was alert and watchful of the smoke and flames. As the wind drove the black clouds toward the beasts their uneasiness grew into panic. Running together they began, horses and cattle alike, to move toward the camp. Little was needed to start them into blind fear.

That little was supplied by the careful Khlit.

With his horse at a free gallop the Cossack drove into the throng of beasts erect in his saddle, waving his heavy sheepskin coat and shouting at the top of his voice. The animals nearest him broke into a gallop, others accompanied them. The cattle tossed their heads, and here and there Khlit saw a horse rear upon the back of another, or the broad horns of a steer upflung. Closer and closer the frightened

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cattle pressed together, until he was forced to climb on the back of his horse to avoid hurt to his legs.

Another moment and the great herd of the Tatars was in full flight, with the roar and crackle of flames at their backs toward the encampment.

The Tatars who were near the herd had not been idle. Several of them had pushed into the front of the throng, trying to turn the beasts to one side. Some went down, others were carried along in the resistless mass of several thousand beasts. Shouts, arrows and waving cloths were useless in attempts to control the herd, now that the patches of fire in the rear had been united and spread out on either flank. The herd had smelled smoke and fear drove them on.

Jammed in the center of the herd, where he had taken his place at the start of the mad race was Khlit. Such aid as he could give to his horse he did, with his sword, keeping the pressure endurable by mercilessly cutting down the cattle around him.

Probably no one but a Cossack could have been sure of his seat and his horse alike in the herd, but Khlit wasted no thought on either. Puffing at his pipe, his sheepskin hat thrust on the side of his head he had eyes only for the camp as the herd crashed into the first streets. The wagon-houses were scattered at first, with crouching camels thronging the streets.

At the advent of the herd the camels scrambled clumsily to their feet and joined the flight. Houses crashed over on their sides at the first impact of the herd which now split up and flowed through the openings, crushing Tatar riders who did not keep pace with them and pounding underfoot anything living which got in their way.

Thus did Khlit ride through the Tatar camp, as he had promised.

Arrows were shot at him from a distance, but none of the Tatars succeeded in getting near him, owing to the herd. The arrows missed their mark. Indeed Khlit was soon lost to sight in the clouds of smoke which swelled around the camp. The confusion grew into a tumult of bellowing beasts, and shrieking women and children in the houses, who comparatively safe from the herd, dreaded fire.

Once near the farther edge of the camp Khlit saw a strange thing. From one of the wagons sprang a weird figure, masked and clothed in a mass of hanging iron images that clashed as he ran. In his arms were clutched some bags which he did not abandon, even when he essayed to mount a horse in the tumult. Looking back over his shoulder Khlit found that the *shaman* was lost to view in the smoke.

All the Tatars had seen Khlit enter the camp, but very few saw him leave. By the time that the herd had gained the open space on the farther side of the camp the smoke had descended like a pall over the plain. Such Tatar horsemen as had escaped hurt, and had not been borne away by the rush of beasts were forced to fight off the advancing flames. Some wagons were put in motion. Others were abandoned. None had time to follow Khlit.

Far into the plain on the other side raced the herd, only stopping when they could run no farther. Then the beasts separated and came to a halt, trembling and panting. Khlit slipped from his mount and, leading the horse, lost no time in gaining the nearest shelter of woods.

Once, as he climbed the hill that separated him from the steppe, Khlit looked back at the smouldering plain, smoke-covered, strewn with exhausted cattle, at the wrecked wagon-houses and the Tatars, dimly seen in the twilight, put to their utmost to keep the flames from the camp; then he turned his face to the steppe.

KHLIT sat again in front of his house, watching the surface of Father Dnieper. As usual, he was alone. And he was turning over many things in his mind.

The Cossacks of the Siech had returned from Poland. Menelitza had come with them. The boy, as Khlit expected, had won fame as a fighter. He was an approved knight. Yet Menelitza had not come to see Khlit nor had the old Cossack sought out his foster-son.

As Alevna had not known of Khlit's battle for her, or of the ride through the Tatar camp when he rode with the herd, before the flames, the news had not spread in the Ukraine, for he himself had said nothing. Yet, out of his wise knowledge, Khlit foresaw that a tongue there was no stopping would tell how the ride was accomplished and the camp of Khan Mirai thrown into a chaos of blood and flame.

That, he thought, was fitting, for the raid upon Garniv should not go unavenged

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and it would gladden the hearts of his old comrades to know how Khlit had made the Tatar chief pay the price of his daring.

As before, Khlit's shaggy head lifted alertly at a sound approaching—a patter of horse hoofs and a jingle of bells. Seeing that it was only Yemel, the Cossack sank back on his seat while the Jewish trader brought his pack animals to a halt, and sprang to the ground.

"Ha!" said Khlit, surveying him amusedly, "I thought you had left your carcass where it would do no more harm."

"No thanks to you, Khlit, I am here," snarled the trader. "Murderer, mad Cossack, do you value lives as little as cattle?"

"Less," smiled Khlit, "in battle. Did you not reap spoil enough without whining for gold and jewels——"

"My pay!" gasped Yemel. "Noble sir, I have your word! Ten times the value of the costliest emerald. Did I not sleep in the wagon-house with the man I had killed, to take his place? As God is my witness, the Khan and *mirza* came to the house and sat on the body of the dead *shaman* while I danced to keep their mind from the taint of the place."

Khlit threw back his head and laughed long. Yemel seized his chance.

"Did not I make an excellent *shaman*, noble sir? Well for you I knew the Tatar camp as a dog knows his kennel. Did I not serve you well, carrying out your plans, even as you said? And the pay is little for such a risk."

Khlit waved his hand toward the cottage.

"Take what you can carry away, Yemel," he answered. "I need not such things. For I shall be alone now. Menelitza has taken Alevna to wife."

Just for an instant the Jew glanced curiously at the old Cossack, somber now and gazing out over the waters of Father Dnieper. He made as if to say something, hesitated noting the sadness in the Cossack's eyes, shook his head shrewdly, and, taking a heavy bag from his pack-horse vanished quietly inside the hut.

ISLANDS

BY RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER

THERE is something about islands which no printed words convey;
They are magnets: why, we can not quite explain.
Is it that a ring of water grants our wish to break away
From the iron grooves we poke along for gain?
There's a magic (that is certain), lasting magic (that is sure)
About islands which affects both young and gray;
And treasure-trove of pirate gold can hardly be the lure,
For their magic is as old as night and day.

Siren-old, it called to nations when Phœnicia rowed the sea
And when Greece and Rome went sweeping south and west;
To Saxon, Viking, Englishman, to Don and Portuguee,
While minstrels sang the Islands of the Blest.
There's a magic (you have felt it), haunting magic (how it grips)
About islands (hillman, plainsman, though you be)
Which stirs you as a boy is stirred by driving full-rigged ships:
It's as natural as the instinct to be free!

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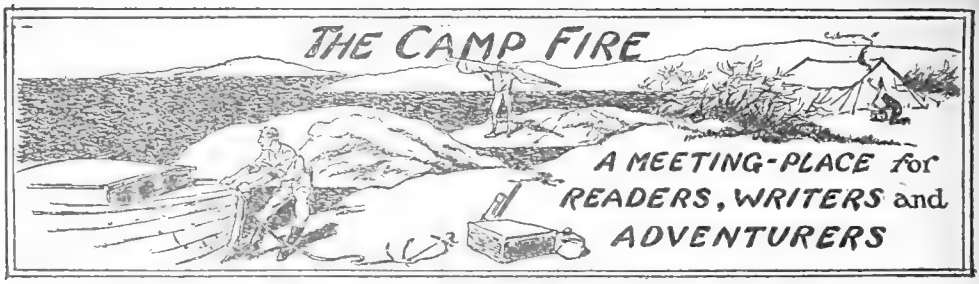

FROM E. A. Brininstool, of Los Angeles, comes further information he has gathered concerning one of the early pioneers of the West, some interesting data to be added to the information we of the Camp-Fire are gradually collecting about the old-timers before they slip out of the memories of living men:

For the benefit of those who may desire some further information about Frank Grouard, one of the greatest scouts and frontiersmen on the plains from 1865 up to and including the Ghost Dance War of 1890, I would like to add the following:

FRANK GROUARD'S father went to the Island of Tahiti in the South Seas along about 1845. He married a woman native of that country by whom he had two or three children, Frank among them. Frank was born in 1850. When he was two years old his father returned to the United States with his wife and family and settled at San Bernardino, Southern California. His wife, however, was unable to stand the climate, so she returned to her own people when Frank was about five years old, and neither Frank nor his father ever saw her again. She took the other children with her, but nobody ever knew what became of them. The elder Grouard learned that she had died, some years later.

Frank's father removed to San Francisco when Frank was a small boy, and finally placed the lad with a family named Pratt, who removed to southern Nevada, where Frank lived until he was fifteen years old. He grew tired of the life he was living and ran away, going to Montana and doing various things until he was nineteen, at which time he was a mail-carrier. On his route one day he was taken captive by a band of Sioux Indians. All but one were anxious to kill him on the spot, but the lone Indian stood out for taking him prisoner. It developed that this Indian was the noted Sitting Bull. Young Grouard's life was spared and he was carried away captive.

For nineteen months he was watched very closely by the Indians, until he saw that it was futile to try to escape, as he never was allowed to leave the camp alone. He then entered into the Indian life with real zest, and soon could outstrip every Indian in a foot-race, and was counted the best shot and game hunter in the band. He threw aside all the garments of civilization and adopted the breech-clout and moccasins of the Sioux, going with them on their wars against their hereditary enemies, the Crows, and other tribes.

Sitting Bull took a great liking to Frank Grouard, as did the great chief, Crazy Horse. For the next five years Grouard applied himself diligently to his surroundings. He learned the Sioux dialect until he understood it and could speak it as fluently as any Indian. The roving customs of his captors was also of the greatest benefit to him, for he grew to know every foot of the country around the Big Horns and through the Yellowstone and Powder River section, and as far east as the Black Hills. Gen. George Crook, the greatest fighter who ever went against the Indians, once said that he would "rather lose a third of his command than Frank Grouard." The scout's memory and wonderful keenness of the country were a constant marvel to Crook, for Grouard could go anywhere, day or night, with as unerring accuracy as if the country were laid out like a picture before him. He never used a compass, but one day he did smash one that an officer was using in a blinding snow-storm while leading his command. Grouard "borrowed" the compass and smashed it on a rock, then himself took the lead and guided the command straight to the spot they were destined for.

AFTER Grouard had been with the Indians six years, he came to the conclusion that he had stayed as long with his captors as he cared to, so one night he "lit out," joined the United States Army and took the trail against his former allies, the Sioux, and, it is needless to say, his services to the Government were of inestimable value. His knowledge of the habits and customs of the Sioux placed him in the front ranks of all the scouts with the army. He never made a mistake when guiding a command of soldiers on a scout. During the Sioux war of 1876 he performed his greatest services to the Government. It would take a hundred magazines to record the wonderful escapes and thrilling experiences which Grouard passed through in his capacity as scout. The Sioux were forever trying to capture him again, but Grouard well knew that it would be death by torture if he were ever taken alive—and he never was.

IN 1894 Grouard saw his father again for the first time since he was five years old. The old gentleman was living in Santa Ana, Cal., and learned that a Frank Grouard, well known as a frontiersman, was living in Sheridan, Wyoming. Correspondence followed, and the elder Grouard journeyed to Sheridan to see his son. After a visit of a month he returned to his home in California and died shortly after.

That is the latest date that I can give about this

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wonderful man. I do not know if he is yet alive, but am corresponding with a friend of his in Denver, though I am under the impression that Grouard died in Wyoming some years ago.

The information I have here given is taken from a book written by Joe DeBarth, a Wyoming newspaper man, entitled "The Life and Adventures of Frank Grouard." It was published in 1894, and at that time Grouard was living near Fort McKinney, Wyoming.

Later: Just received from Grouard's Denver friend, who was very intimate with him at Sheridan, Wyo., imformation that Grouard died in St. Joseph, Mo., some four or five years ago.—E. A. BRININSTOOL.

ANOTHER of our number, now serving on an American ship in the European service, writes concerning two other pioneers:

Concerning the statement in the August Camp-Fire regarding Amos Chapman, if it is the man that lived near Cleo, Okla., and frequently came into Watonga, I can positively certify that he is still alive as I saw him in the flesh—and an old lumber-wagon—in Cleo last Summer.

As to Curley, I saw him in Coffeyville last Summer.

Am still defying Bill and his tin fish with the same packet and hope to call on you pronto.

HERE'S an interesting idea from one of our comrades that might well be carried out by natives of other States as well as by those of Indiana:

I am a soldier, a Lance-Corporal, in the regular army, having enlisted since war was declared. I am an enthusiastic reader of *Adventure* and of Camp-Fire and am greatly interested in the good work it does.

I am a native of Indiana, therefore a Hoosier, and I am interested in all Hoosiers, especially Hoosiers in the Military or Naval Service of Uncle Sam, or of the Allies.

Now I would like to organize a council whereby all Hoosiers of the abovementioned class could unite and communicate, etc. And I desire your cooperation; it would be an added service to Hoosier readers of which there are many in the service of Uncle Sam.

MY IDEA is to organize an "International Council of Hoosiers" to be composed entirely of Hoosiers in Uncle Sam's Naval or Military Service, that to be the requirement for membership.

Later we could be incorporated and have somebody design us nice membership badges and have Local Councils of Hoosiers on battleships or in regiments or battalions.

Until we get permanently organized and can have an election, I will assume the duties of secretary-general. If you will help me in this object please write me soon.—CHAUNCEY D. JONES, I. C. H., Co. C, 54th U. S. Inf., Military Branch, Chattanooga, Tenn.

GENERAL BENJAMIN JOHANNIS VILJOEN has sat with us at our Camp-Fire. His was a well-filled past and out of its rich supply he told us things we found very interesting. When he died in January there was still in our safe another tale of his, not a fiction story but a bit out of his own past, and it is given to you in this issue.

He was born in the Cape Province, South Africa, September 7, 1868, a descendant of Francoa Villion, who, with other French Huguenots, fled France in the days of Louis XIV. He spent his boyhood in Tembuland, migrating to the Transvaal Republic when about sixteen, entering the Transvaal Mounted Police at nineteen. Several years later he was appointed chief organizer of the entire militia force. At twenty-four he led the successful two-year expedition against King Bruno of Swazieland. As an officer under Cronje he aided in the defeat of the Jameson expedition. A year later he was publicly congratulated by General Joubert for bravery against the revolting Mapoch Kaffirs.

WHEN the war with England started he was a member of the Transvaal Legislature but was made commander of the citizen forces of the Johannesberg district. He served at Elandslaagte, Modderspruit, Ladysmith, on the Tugela, Spionkop, Vaalkrans. It is said that, covering the retreat of his regiment through a mountain pass with a machine-gun, he single-handed exterminated what was left of the Eighteenth Hussars.

In 1900, after the fall of Pretoria, General Viljoen was placed in command of the Boer army and proved a thorn in the side of the British. Two weeks before peace was declared he was ambushed and captured after being wounded. He has told us that tale himself, and many of you will remember "The Story of a Piebald Horse."

HE WAS banished to St. Helena for life. When England was pardoning all who would take the oath of allegiance he refused to take that step but England finally permitted him to accept Colonel Theodore Roosevelt's invitation to come to the United States. In 1903 he was in charge of the Boer exhibit at the St. Louis World's Fair, and in that city he met and married his wife. Shortly afterward he settled on a ranch near La Mesa, N. M., but he could

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not remain long inactive. In 1910 he became Madero's military adviser and was largely instrumental in toppling over Diaz. A year later he was made peace commissioner to the Yaquis, but illness forced his resignation and he was made Mexican consul in Breslau, Germany, visiting his old enemies in England. Still ill, he returned to New Mexico, and was made a member of the Governor's staff. In 1914 he went to Los Angeles and later settled in Sierra Madre, but continued ill-health sent him back to New Mexico.

Some of these things he himself told us, but his modesty omitted other things that history records. A full life bravely lived. Our salute to him.

THE side-lights and bits of Indian history, customs and psychology Hugh Pendexter gives the Camp-Fire concerning his stories of pioneer days are almost as interesting as the stories themselves:

The plains tribes generally believed that the Pawnee were the first to possess the calumet, receiving it from the sun. This story is based on the fact it was the most sacred object known to the Indians north of Mexico. J. N. B. Hewitt, of the Bureau of American Ethnology, in writing on the calumet, mentions an occasion when a band of Sioux, "seeking to destroy some Indians and their protectors, a French officer and his men, presented, in the guise of friendship, twelve calumets, apparently of peace. But the officer, who was versed in such matters and whose suspicions were aroused by the number offered, observed one of the shafts was not matted with hair like the others, and that on the shaft was graven the figure of a viper, coiled around it." As this was the sign of covert treachery, the Sioux plot was frustrated.

THIS incident suggested the hinge on which to swing the yarn. In building it I had to consider authorities on trade routes, trails, signaling, sign language, uses of the calumet, tipi structure, etiquette, buffalo hunting, ethnology of Dakota (Sioux) and Pawnee and Comanche, free trappers, fur companies, etc.

LETTERS have been coming in endorsing the little editorial "With Us Or Against Us" in our Mid-October Camp-Fire. So far there have been no outcries from the hyphenates, but doubtless some of them are cursing me. I hope so.

I want to give you here one of the letters that came in, for it contains some ideas that I had not advanced but which seem to me along the right line. It's time for all real Americans to show their colors, to exchange ideas and to begin to *act.* A country at war which allows newspapers printed in the language of its enemies to be freely published and circulated within its own borders surely *needs* help and action from its loyal citizens. If many real Americans are too much asleep or too much afraid to protest against and stop this and a dozen kindred practises, then those of us who *are* awake must do the work.

IT IS both weak and dangerous to allow the enemy spirit within our very midst to publish and spread itself broadcast in the enemy's language, or in our own. To see, here in America, a man with Teuton written all over him, riding in our cars, mixing freely with us, protected by our laws, and calmly reading a newspaper printed in the language of our German enemies, does that mean nothing to you? Most of us can not even read German, can not tell just how much the spirit of sedition and enemy hate is preached and fostered by the particular sheet in his hands, but we know from the facts of the past that too many of the German-language papers do foster these things and that *no* sheet of any kind published in German should be circulating in this country.

Every paper of any kind, whether printed in German or English, if it in any way, however indirectly, preaches treason to the United States, if it in any way fosters here in this country the German spirit instead of the American spirit, German tradition instead of American tradition, should be permanently suppressed. Any man or woman who reads one of them in public brands himself as an enemy of America and should be treated accordingly.

NOT only are too many of our politician Congressmen and other public officials so much afraid of the "German-American votes" that they do not act, but a few of them have practically openly espoused the cause of Germany in America. What can we expect of such self-seeking weaklings, such betrayers of our country when it comes to suppressing German propaganda in this country? But there are real Americans, too, among our public officers and it is up to *us* to get behind them, and against the others, with every ounce of energy in us.

When these same weakling or disloyal Congressmen and others come up again for election to any American public office *are*

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the Germans and German sympathizers in America to give them these American honors? Is America to reward them for having served against America?

AREN'T we at last getting tired of seeing the enemies in our midst handled with kid gloves, allowed to go on with their work against us? Aren't we tired of seeing Americans afraid to handle these enemies as enemies should be handled? The timid cry out that we mustn't alienate our German-American citizens, must bind them to us by kindness. Bah! We've given them every chance. Those of them who are citizens and have it in them to be loyal to America have already shown that loyalty, are of us and are to be treated like ourselves. Those who have taken oath of allegiance to America and already broken that oath in act, word or spirit have already made traitors of themselves. Those who are not citizens even in name are merely enemies in our midst. And these traitors and these enemies should be treated as traitors and enemies.

Don't make them hate us? Rot! They hate us already. Hate us, sneer at us, hold us in contempt, plot against us, do their utmost against us. If they had the power they would grind us into the dirt as their brothers have ground the Belgians; if German armies could land on our shores these Germans in America would join them on the instant and help in the Prussian work of atrocities against *our* women, children and other non-combatants, of destroying our towns and countrysides, of needless ruin and desolation and all the other outrages that have marked German conquest of other countries and that would surely mark the German conquest of the United States if the Kaiser could carry out his expressed intention of attending to America next. Treat them kindly, handle them with kid gloves! Let us not be impolite!

I AM no believer in mob-law but I am a most firm believer in the power of public opinion brought to bear in legitimate way. And it is you and I and the rest of us who make public opinion. A people who have produced the Minute Men, the Ku Klux Klan, the Vigilantes, the Texas Rangers can, when necessary, and by lawful means, make deadly plain to traitors in our midst that we too have iron in our blood even if it does express itself in the acts of a man, not the acts of a beast.

IN THE following letter I call your attention particularly to the points made concerning the teaching of German in our schools, to immigration and to the general status of enemy aliens after the war. Most of you know that whatever I, or any of you, say at our Camp-Fire has to be written nearly three months before you read it. Many changes in public affairs may take place in that interim; it is hard enough to keep up to date in these hurrying times, and infinitely harder to try to keep up to three months ahead of date. But certain truths remain truths at all times and I think what you find in the following letter will be as true when you read it as it is now in September.

Louisville, Ky.

As it is very probable that some of your pro-German readers will adversely criticize your editorial, "With Us Or Against Us" which appeared in your Mid-October issue, I am yielding to the impulse to write this letter, endorsing every word of your article.

UNFORTUNATELY for this country you have stated many truths and it is the part of every true American not only to endorse your statements but they should do all they possibly can to suppress disloyalty on the part of every one within our borders.

Any adverse criticism of the Government which appears in newspapers, magazines, etc., borders on treason, for this is no time for destructive criticism. Constructive criticism may be helpful if handled through the proper channels but we can not be too careful in making critical statements which we expect to be productive of good results in prosecuting the war to a successful conclusion.

American citizens of German and Austrian blood must bear in mind that the actions of many of their kin have caused us to regard with suspicion persons of German birth and while there are many true Americans with German names yet there are many of similar names who are traitors at heart, if not in act, to American ideals.

Therefore such loyal Americans with German names must be careful that no act or word of theirs will give ground for suspicion and they themselves should be zealous in preventing seditious utterances and acts on the part of any one. Only by such care will such Americans prove their worth and retain a place in our esteem and affections which was once held by the German peoples as a whole and which place has been lost forever by the Prussians and Huns.

THIS great country has and will continue to have many serious problems, but the adoption of your ideas will tend to eliminate many of those problems.

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No man of foreign birth or of foreign ancestry can expect to become a true American if he attempts to maintain Old-Country customs, languages, etc.

The language of the United States and Canada is English and this only should be taught in our public schools.

I agree with you that the following should be done:

Stamp out every German Alliance Organization of any kind in this country, local or general, social, athletic or political.

Stamp out every publication printed in the language of our enemies.

Stamp out English language publications which have been, are now or which may hereafter be guilty of seditious utterances or the publishing of any article calculated to hamper the Government in the prosecution of the war or to interfere with the manufacture, production, or transportation of any and all goods required by our soldiers or their dependents.

IN ADDITION I say that all traitors should be tried for treason and not let off with a simple admonishment. I also say that no man of enemy blood should be allowed to naturalize for the next generation or two at least. No subject of an enemy country should be allowed, after peace is declared, to acquire property, *i. e.*, real estate, in America.

In fact I believe that if all aliens were prevented from acquiring real estate in the United States some of our international problems would be prevented.

An alien might be allowed to lease property with privilege of purchase at a stipulated price after he had been a naturalized citizen for say five years.

Naturalization papers should not be granted to any alien who is unable to carry on an ordinary conversation in our language.

IN CONCLUSION I ask that our Irish kin remember that we are fighting autocracy and defending North and South America from German ambition as exemplified by the Hapsburgs and Hohenzollerns. I am an American of English, Scotch, French and Irish blood and the mixture boils at the thought of Hunnish atrocities as well as at American (?) traitors' actions in attempting to hamper our President in his fight for civilization and democracy.

I am with you and may 100 per cent. of your readers be also with you in thought and action.—W. R. HARRIS.

WE HAD a poem from Stanley Hofflund once but this issue contains the first story he has given us, so he stands up according to Camp-Fire custom and introduces himself:

My own adventures, I am afraid, would not be very interesting to a Camp-Fire group which has listened to intimate tales of African jungles and polar expeditions. Mine are of a more easy-going, home-loving character. I don't mean to apologize for them, for I have hugely enjoyed tramping through the Sierras—high and low—and Adventuring America First, so to speak, as a sort of preparation for greater adventures I dream of undertaking later.

I AM a newspaper reporter, with all the eagerness for "scoops" on police department scandals and grand jury graft probes which the very mention of my profession suggests. I like it much better than running a country store, a real-estate office, or anything else I ever tackled except ranching on a Southern California ranch. That last is—next to going to heaven—my idea of an ideal ultimate, provided, of course, that the ranch is in the mountains, is highly impracticable from a commercial standpoint, and sort of runs itself while the owner goes hunting and fishing or sticks a big pine log into a big stone hearth, sits in a big, soft chair, and writes stories about the sterling qualities displayed by others who endure hardships.

I WROTE the "Last Cup of Tea" while on the prettiest ranch in the world—near Alpine, San Diego County, Cal. The natural beauties and scenic wonders of that mountain ranch were hoary with age, but accommodations for properly housing human bodies were not yet born. You see, it was a new ranch so far as my friend, who had just bought it, and I were concerned.

And it was bitterly cold—yes, in Southern California. There was snow on the mountain nearest us. And we ran out of tea, dividing the last cup before retiring into our sleeping-bags.

It occurred to me that a last cup of tea, under severe conditions, can become of sufficient importance to be made the basis for a story. I transplanted the plot to Lundy, Mono County, having reason to know that to be a frigid region in Winter. I tramped through it once, and on over the divide into Yosemite. I had been working in a mine at Bodie. I remember that the entire galvanized iron shed of the Lundy Mine cyanide plant had been lifted up by a snow-slide and carried hundreds of yards up the mountainside across the narrow gorge, leaving the cyanide vats exposed, like a series of entirely uncalled-for cisterns. I know, you see, that it grows cold enough up there to be the proper setting for a story dealing with frigidity and the consequent craving for hot tea.

I WROTE "Steppin' on the Throttle of a Mountain Stage," a verse appearing earlier in *Adventure*, while marooned in the mountains between San Diego and the Imperial Valley desert, during the big floods of January, 1916, which caused death in Southern California through broken dams and flooded valleys. In attempting to drive my car through Morena Creek—about 200 feet wide from the flood, on a night so dark and squally that my searchlight would not pick out the approach on the opposite bank—I became unintentionally converted into a submarine commander. My craft was salvaged two weeks later. The actual heroism displayed by auto stage drivers, who made automobiles do stunts unbelievable, inspired the verses.

That's all I know about myself except that I am thirty-three years old, hale and hearty as a youngster, married, and like the Camp-Fire gang immensely.—STANLEY HOFFLUND.

OUR boys are gradually going to the front and the Camp-Fire wants to keep track of them there, to know how they fare, to know as much about what is going

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on as the censor will permit. Also, if your comrades over there are lonely or want a correspondent back home, give your full military address and there'll surely be some among us to drop you a line of comradeship. If the letters of all can't be published we will, if you give the word, publish your name and address as one of our boys at the front who wants letters from back home in the good old U. S. A.

Our "Letter Friends" department had to be abolished, but we'll revive it for the sole use of Americans and Canadians at the front. I know that we back here will welcome the chance to write and that, besides letters, we can make some small individual shipments of tobacco, reading-matter and other little odds and ends.

Time for Our Annual Vote

ALL the 1917 issues of *Adventure* are in your hands, from January, 1917, to mid-December, 1917, inclusive, and the vote by our readers to determine the best ten stories in our magazine during this past year closes December thirty-first. This annual vote is the best means we of our editorial staff can devise for making *Adventure's* stories the kind that please our readers best. It's up to you, so go to it.

The voting is simple and easy. Any one, subscriber or not, is eligible to vote if he's read at least seven of the 1917 issues. Serials, novels, novelettes, articles and short stories included; poems and "Camp-Fire" barred. The same author may appear on the list as many times as you please. All you need do is write down your ten selections numbered in order of preference, giving title and author of each, sign your name and mail us the letter or post-card. If you like, add as many as ten more stories for complimentary mention.

Remember that no stories are counted unless they were published in one of the issues *bearing the printed date* 1917—January, 1917, to mid-December, 1917, inclusive. This issue in your hands is *not* included. However, a serial appearing partly in 1917 and partly in 1918 or 1916 *is* included in the vote.

The result of the vote will be published in a subsequent issue.

MANY of you will recognize the soldier on our cover this issue as one of that famous body of French troops, the Chasseurs Alpins of the 47th Division, better known to the Germans and to all the world as "the Blue Devils of France." You will remember that these same Blue Devils were among the French troops assigned to instruct General Pershing's men in modern trench warfare.

I CAN'T know what steps will have been taken, by the time this reaches you, toward suppressing German, German-American and American pro-German sedition in our midst, but it's pretty safe to say that the intervening two or three months aren't at all likely to see the end of this treasonable menace. The American Defense Society is making a brave and direct campaign against this evil and wants as many real Americans as possible to enroll as regular members, get the Society's button, service instruction card and certificate of membership. Their motto is a pungent one that bears thinking about—"You Need Your Country."

It's patriotic work they're asking of you. I'm sending my dollar and enrolling. How about you? And let's not let our part stop with the mere handing over of a dollar.

Here's the way they state their case:

Serve at the front or serve at home. To win this war we must jail German spies. Will you give a dollar to help put them all in jail?

If you can't go to the trenches, serve at home, and stand by the man at the front. Telegraph, write or bring us reports of German activities in your district. Aid in patriotic work by enrolling and serving as a regular member of the American Defense Society. Only Americans need apply for membership. Our service card will explain how you can serve your country at home. Advisory Board: HON. DAVID JAYNE HILL, Ex-Ambassador to Germany; HON. ROBERT BACON, Ex-Ambassador to France; HON. PERRY BELMONT, Vice-President, Navy League; HON. CHARLES J. BONAPARTE, Ex-Attorney-General, U. S.; JOHN GRIER HIBBEN, LL.D., President, Princeton University; HENRY B. JOY, President Lincoln Highway Association; HUDSON MAXIM, Member Naval Advisory Board; HON. THEODORE ROOSEVELT, Ex-President of the United States.

Your dollar is needed. Make checks payable to Robert Appleton, Treasurer, American Defense Society, 303 Fifth Ave., New York.

YOU'VE noticed that all the headings in one issue of our magazine are drawn by one artist. If any of you have any marked preference for the headings of one or more of the nine or ten artists who do most of this work for us, drop us a line. We're trying to please *you*, you know, and every opinion from the readers helps a little in showing us how to do it.

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NOT long ago we had a letter from our comrade Dean Ivan Lamb, American in the British Royal Flying Corps, saying that he hoped to get his discharge in order to offer his trained services to his own country and that maybe he'd be dropping in at *Adventure* headquarters before long. He did so last week. Had secured his discharge, was expecting the final papers in a few days, had landed in this country the morning of the day I saw him and was already on the job of connecting up with the U. S. service. He has been in the R. F. C. over two years, had sixteen months in France, a sergeant, and is officially credited with seven German machines —a man invaluable in training American aviators. And a clear-eyed, upstanding, modest fellow of whom the Camp-Fire can be proud. ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure's* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules,* thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure,* New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

Wanted: Issues prior to Nov. 1914; also, 1915, Feb.; 1917, Jan.—WILLIAM H. WALTERS, 14 Baker Street, Richmond, Victoria, Australia.

Will sell: 1914, Nov., Dec., 1915, all; 1916, all; 1917, Jan.—Sept. inclusive; 35 issues, perfect condition, $3.50 and carriage.—N. W. PEIERSON, 1161 North Street, Peoria, Ill.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Adventurers' Club—No connection with this magazine, but data will be furnished by us. Can join only by attending a meeting of an existing chapter or starting a new chapter as provided in the Club's rules.

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. Entirely separate from Adventurers' Club, but, like it, first suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Bldg., Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

National School Camp Ass'n—Military and industrial training and camps for boys 12 or over. Address 1 Broadway, New York City.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—A similar organization cooperating with the N. S. C. A. (above). Address *Everybody's,* Spring and Macdougal, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea—Part 1
S. B. H. HURST, Box 892, Seattle, Wash. ★ Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Hurst.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N.Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3
Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. North American Snow Countries Part 1
C. L. GILMAN, 708 Oneida Bldg., Minneapolis, Minn. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

11. ★North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

12. ★North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

13. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game; minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel: boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

15. Hawaiian Islands and China
P. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

16. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Sayville, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras,

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Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

17. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

18. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, care R. J. Neuman, 160 Seaman Ave., Inwood, New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

19. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

20. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY, Remount No. 2, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

21. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

22. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

23. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

24. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, care of H. E. ROBERTS, 55 John Street, New York, N. Y. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

Georgian Bay Hunting and Fishing

Question:—"I would like some information regarding a proposed Winter trip around Georgian Bay. How is the hunting and fishing? What kinds of fish and big game? Give us some idea of an outfit for three and provisions for two months. Also about transportation—could we go by canoes? When is the best time to go?"—M. L. SUTHERLAND, Chattanooga, Tenn.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—The fishing among the thousands of islands of, and in the swift waters of the tributaries to, Georgian Bay is the best on the continent, without a doubt. From the John L. Sullivan of all game fish, the maskinonge, up to forty pounds and more, all the way down to the slippery, slimy eel; the salmon-trout and the gray and speckled trout, the small and the big mouthed black bass, the great northern pike and the pike-perch, the pickerel and the dory and the whitefish, suckers and bullheads and sunfish—they're all there. And at that I haven't mentioned the sturgeon and several branches of the trout and bass families that are, or "may be" there.

The game is there, too: moose, deer, bear; partridge, ducks and the goose; and, to keep going: beaver, otter, mink, muskrat, fox, rabbits—down to the sly little weasel.

The open season for deer and moose is from the first of November till the fifteenth, both days inclusive; and with the closing of the moose and deer season, all sport really worth while (with the exception of the duck and goose shooting, and you can get all of that you want before then) is legally finished. After that, Winter usually begins to clutch at the land with a steel grip and you've got to work to live. Then, too, every week after that will add tremendously to the bulk and weight of your outfit. Leave on the fifteenth of September and your two months then will cover the best two game-fishing months of the year and a legal shot at everything worth while. Also, you can use canoes both ways—instead of coming back on snow-shoes.

Take the Canadian Pacific Railway at Toronto for French, a run of only eight or nine hours, and spend your two months in the French River district. And if you don't have the time of your lives it will be your own fault. The International Sportsman's Camp is located at French. Guides, white and Indian, if you want a guide, canoes and supplies, can be obtained there. And you will be working up the river on the "in" run; which means that you will have the current with you when you come out loaded. The game is there.

Now as to outfit and provisions, remember it is not a case of what will you take with you so much as what can you do without, and that three healthy young men in the "rough and raw" will consume SOME grub in two months. Fish, of some kind, can be depended on, but a little fish goes a long way; and meat, if you know the hunting game and be not too fastidious (personally, I have found even muskrat very good eating) is watching you from the bushes. But—Safety First. When you make your permanent camp, if you "settle," be sure you have your full two months' provisions, though you have to pack it in in extra trips. Aside from unobtainables: sugar, salt, coffee or tea, butter and tinned milk—if you must have it, tobacco—if you use it, matches, and canned or dried fruits and vegetables, etc., your provisions will depend entirely on your own individual tastes and appetites. Do you like bacon for breakfast? and how much? Can you live on beans? Are any of you vegetarians? Are you very fond of fruit?—Get together with a pencil and pad and figure it out. And remember that the lighter you travel the less work there is.

Outfit too depends on your experience at the game. I once ran across an Englishman on a two weeks' shooting trip who packed in a harp with him; and I

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have heard a tale of a French breed who went "back" with a ten-inch knife in the Fall, and came out the following Spring with eleven hundred dollars' worth of pelts. These are two extremes. Nor have I ever met two, even of the old-timers, who could agree on essentials of either provisions or outfit. But it is safe to say that aside from a well-stocked fishing and hunting kit and plenty of ammunition, the necessities are: canoes, tent—water-proofed and as small and light as possible, cooking and dining utensils—preferably of aluminum and as few as you can get along with, blankets, soap, and matches, matches, matches! Anything else is an extra, and while adding to comfort also adds to the bulk and weight of your load.

In packing your wearing apparel remember that wedged in among some ideal weather you will find days that are rough and wet and rawly cold; days that you'll curse at.

Ship's Carpenter

Question:—"I wish to obtain a position with some Pacific coast steamship, engaged in coastwise or overseas trade. I am a carpenter and plumber by trade, have also a knowledge of steam-fitting and general mechanics. Would this knowledge be of any advantage to me on a steamship or would I have to go as an apprentice seaman? What is the usual pay and opportunity for advancement? Would appreciate the address of a few Pacific Coast steamship companies."—JOSEPH BILEK, Chicago Heights, Ill.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—With your mechanical qualifications you should find a ready acceptance in steamships, and, moreover, in the very finest type of big passenger steamers. A carpenter having plumbing and steam-fitting knowledge possesses everything they need in that line.

Of course, this rating goes no higher than carpenter; the only ultimate attainment is that of shore carpenter, or superintendent of all the carpenters of the company, where the work is on shore and carries a good salary.

It would be useless for me to give you rates of pay at this moment. Before the war the rate for carpenters ranged from $30.00 to $50.00 monthly. The carpenter found his own tools, and clothes; but he berthed comfortably, and ate well, and had many chances of increasing his income by doing side jobs for passengers. He doubled his pay as a rule on big passenger ships. Now, at least in the Atlantic trade, wages have soared beyond all dreams, and while I do not know precisely the figure carpenters are getting at the moment, you may judge nearly when I say that mates and second mates, who used to be well paid at $45.00 to $90.00 per month, are getting at present across the Atlantic $200.00 to $300.00.

If you are ambitious to attain command of a ship, you will have to go to sea as a deckhand, thence to able seaman as soon as fit. There is great demand for men just now; but I must advise you that the demand is far greater on this side of the continent. Then, after three years in the deck force of a steamer, you may qualify for second mate by taking a quite easy examination.

As a carpenter, you will do better to write to the firm, first, stating fully your abilities and asking for a berth. In the seaman class, your only way is to apply to the chief mate in person on board any ship that you fancy; or, go and register at the Seaman's Institute, or Sailor's Home in your nearest port, and tell the superintendent you want to ship. You'll get a ship very soon, though you'll have to sail as ordinary seaman the first voyage I think, unless you strike a steamer carrying a big crew which has at the time many vacancies.

A few names of firms with addresses are: Pacific Mail Steamship Co., Flood Building, San Francisco; Pacific Coast Steamship Co., 112 Market Street, San Francisco; Standard Oil Co., of California, 461 Market Street, San Francisco; California Shipping Co. (sailing ships), 268 Market Street, San Francisco.

If you don't confine your wishes to the Pacific, you'll find many more and better chances on the Atlantic.

Fever Coast of Africa

Question:—"Am interested in the Fever Coast of Africa. I am a seasoned traveler myself. I was a free-lance trader in the South Seas and know Australia and New Zealand well. I have been an opal miner, pearl diver, etc. I am a good rider, bushman and a fair shot, I am English (Yorkshire) and twenty-eight years old.

"Now I would like to ask you a few questions:

"When is the wet season, Summer or Winter? What is the average Summer temperature?

"What are the principal products you trade for—ivory, copra, cocoa, skins or what? What goods do you give in exchange, or do you give money?

"Are there any pearl oysters or clams in the Niger or surrounding rivers, or the sea coast, around this region?

"What game is there? Does it pay to go in for trapping?

"What is the cost of living?"—WILLIAM MILLS, Detroit, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—The wet season varies slightly according to locality, but generally November to the earlier part of February, with heavy, torrential rains in the delta and along the seaboard, and intermittent violent thunderstorms inland.

The trade of the country is palm oil, palm kernels, mahogany, rubber, a dwindling ivory trade, some gold mining in the Ashantee district, and, inland, kola nut, capsicum, feathers, hides.

These are bartered for cotton strips, calicoes, umbrellas, pocket knives, kerosene, hides, with English money for currency, except in the outlying trading stations, where the barter is still counted in cotton strips.

There are no pearls, clams or shell fish to my knowledge, nor do the whites do any trapping. Big-game licenses cost all the way to several hundred dollars, but a shotgun will give you plenty of sport, and it is as well to take along fishing-lines, though the whites mostly succumb to tropical inertia and leave such matters to the natives.

There are no big towns as we understand the term; that is to say no cities peopled by whites, but large native towns, built of hut lanes of branches and leaves, whilst in the interior are more solid towns of adobe. Inland the tribes are semi-civilized, speaking in a general way. On the coast the blacks are of lower intelligence, and where they have been long in contact with whites are rather demoralized and impudent.

If you can inure yourself to native "chop," and it isn't half-way bad, you could get through on twenty to thirty cents a day. But most whites fall

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back on canned foods, which come rather high when they have to be portered far. Every white has his black servant, who is almost a necessity, acting as he does as buyer and interpreter and transmitter of gossip between the white and the black. These "house boys" cost about two bits a day, plus food.

Fur in Blue Ridge Mountains

Question:—"What section of the Blue Ridge Mountains has the greatest amount of deer and fur bearers? What section would be best for a poultry and fur farm so that a market would be within twenty miles. Where can I get information about soil in the valleys of these mountains?"—E. S. SHEPARD, Gaffney, S. C.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—I would not like to try and say which part of the Blue Ridge Mountains has the largest number of deer and fur bearers. No one could answer that question, even after visiting all the region. Also, it would be difficult to make a satisfactory answer, suggesting what parts of the mountains you should visit to trap for a living, or raise fur and poultry. You know, each trapper has his own way of working, and what he can do another could not do. One seeks mink, rats; another possum, coon; and a third hunts deer and turkeys, trapping on the side.

But if you will do this, you can pick your own country, to your own satisfaction: Spend about six weeks in the back country of North Carolina, "going around," looking for sign. The Big Smokies are good bear country for example, and I think that is the best part of the Blue Ridge region. If you just rode around on horseback, or walked, you could cover about 500 miles in six weeks, and this distance in the mountains of North Carolina would give you a better idea than any one could write you. And you know those mountain people will treat you right, if you don't interfere with their local business.

Also, I think the North Carolina region is the best for you, for it is nearer, and it is more apt to have fair trapping; and Asheville is a good market for poultry, and furs, too, I think.

Write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for information about crops and soils, also, for information about poultry raising for market—and I would drop trapping for raising poultry, and furs and gardening, if I were you.

A Living in Alaska

Question:—"I would like some information regarding the hunting and trapping prospects in Southern Alaska. Could one earn a comfortable living there? Is a particularly powerful rifle needed for game there? Is there any land open for settlement, and what crops if any can be raised? About what kind of an outfit should one take?"—L. J. VINING, Neodesha, Kan.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—One could earn a comfortable living in Southern Alaska, without doubt, but if your question implied earning it by hunting and trapping, then it is very doubtful. The restrictions are numerous and the markets small and few.

On this subject, as well as upon your other queries I would advise you to send for "Information for Prospective Settlers in Alaska, Circular No. 1 (revised)" States Relations Service, U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

The information relative to game will indicate that firearms usually employed for similar game here in the main United States will be satisfactory in Alaska. The Alaska grizzly (not found, however, frequently on the coast) requires, for safety, a particularly powerful gun, and it is also well to use a large bore, if not a high-speed rifle in hunting moose, though usually moose drop easily.

There are all kinds of land open for settlement, though on the southern coast the areas are more restricted in size than in the interior. Practically all land has to be cleared, the south coast is very humid and matures grain crops poorly and uncertainly from that cause. In general, see above circular, also Governor's report, 1916, Dept. of the Interior, and reports of Agricultural Experiments Stations, Agricultural Department. Also General information regarding the Territory of Alaska, Department of the Interior. All these are to be got at Washington, without charge.

Little information is given respecting outfits in these publications, and I can give you only general advice, since your questions cover so wide a field. In Southern Alaska, protection from rain and snow is essential and it would be well to be provided with good canvas, rubber ponchos, etc., which you could select more satisfactorily here. Aside from your purely personal equipment, however, I always advise buying practically nothing either for a temporary sojourn or an extended stay or settlement. The stores are supplied at reasonable prices, with every species of merchandise, selected according to the results of many years' experience. It is better to take a chance on having to send out for something not locally purchasable than to encumber one's self with useless or ill-adapted articles. Another reason is that one usually travels about quite a little before settling down and an outfit under such circumstances is an expensive encumbrance.

Alaska is a good place to settle for a physically energetic and determined man, the hunting and fishing are good and enable one to live with little money. In the interior, trapping for small fur-bearing animals continues to be a good business, especially if combined with trading. Trading is still *fair* on the south coast.

"Cadets" on Merchant Ships

Question:—"I will appreciate your answers to the following questions relative to a cadet aboard a merchant ship, his duties, knowledge necessary of mathematics and seamanship, pay and experience required by steamship companies. Also any other information concerning studies which would be useful to one desiring to follow the sea. I am a young fellow, nineteen years of age, husky with the usual amount of gray matter in my top-piece. At present I am in a Marine Corps stationed at Philadelphia. I have plenty of opportunity to study and to prepare myself for a cadetship if possible.

"Would also like some information about nautical schools near New York and their tuition fees."—BRUCE MCCULLOUGH, Philadelphia, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Hurst:—By "cadet" in a merchant ship I presume you mean apprentice (sometimes called cadet as a courtesy title in British ships), known on the ships as "boy." It has been customary since almost the beginning of ships for boys to be "articled apprenticed" to the owners of them; sometimes by paying a certain sum of money at the time of signing indentures, sometimes without any payment; but the custom is not so general as formerly,

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except in the case of boys who have spent some years on training ships where they are trained to become officers—time on a training-ship counting as half time at sea on the four years' service required before going up for examination for second mate's papers. The American custom has been slightly different, the boys in most cases signing on from voyage to voyage, although remaining in the same ship. In general every owner has his own system.

The pay in British ships is nothing, except, as I understand, in some of the large steamers which only take training-ship boys; but in American vessels the boy's pay increases from year to year. By nothing I mean of course "a shilling a month."

However, if you are thinking of going to sea in a merchant ship, with the object of working up to be an officer, take my advice and don't go as a boy at all. Sign on as ordinary seaman, previous experience being entirely unnecessary. And you will be paid the wages of the Port. A husky young man like you can easily get a ship, if you knock around "sailor town" for a day or two; and I have seen lots of men sign on as able seaman who never saw a ship before, and get away with it. It would be foolish of you to go as a boy—no pay, and the jobs the mate doesn't like to give the men; and I have yet to see a boy get any special instruction.

I have master's papers, and got them by studying in my watch below. Get a "Norie's Epitome," and go to it with a pencil and paper. The seamanship you will get through your work, but you can buy innumerable books on the subject which tell you the questions examiners ask. Sign on in some square-rigged sailing-ship as O. S. Make the voyage, and you will see the road clear ahead of you to being captain, if you want to work. Avoid all nice-speaking gentlemen who offer to teach you, although there are several excellent navigation schools advertised where you may, if you think you need it, put in a week (no more) just before each of your exams.

Be glad to answer anything I have not made plain, but it has been well said that the way to glory on the quarter deck is through the hawse pipes.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN IN FIVE OF ALL THOSE ASKED FOR DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS.

ANDERSON, CHARLES MICHELL, last heard of in Phila. Pa. two years ago. Was once a well-to-do horse trainer. 60 years. His old friend would like to hear from him.—Address CHAMBLIN F. HANCOCK, 67 Canfield, East, Detroit, Mich.

YEUSAN, ALFRED, brother. Born Jan. 11, 1883. Was adopted from the Protestant Orphan Home, Cleveland, O. by a William Sprague of Clyde, O. and stayed with him until 1887. No one has heard of him since. Goes by name of George Sprague.—Address MRS. E. R. STALNAKER, care Camp 4, Matlock, Wash.

NOACK, HERBERT (sergeant) Co. Clerk and Taft (Runt). I never knew his first name. Both of E Troop, 14th U. S. Cavalry, last heard of in Camp Stotsonberg, P. I.—Address A. A. NEWLAND, U. S. S. *Buffalo*, care Postmaster, San Francisco, Calif.

ACKEN, B. C. (Barney) and Ed. Marnell, shipmates on the U. S. S. *South Dakota*, one was discharged in 1912 other in 1913. Have never heard from them since. Write to your old friend.—Address A. A. NEWLAND, U. S. S. *Buffalo*, care Postmaster, San Francisco, Calif.

LINDHOLM, VICTOR A., missing since 1903. Served in Co. K, 18th Regiment Inf. in Philippines. Discharged at San Francisco, Calif. Feb. 7, 1898. Re-enlisted in regular army 1903. At San Francisco regiment not known. When last heard from was on way to Cuba with his company. Any one knowing his whereabouts please notify his mother.—Address MRS. ANNA JENKINS, 1510 5th St. East, Calgary, Alberta, Can.

BURNS, WM., formerly of Dubuque, Iowa. Was in Eldora 1904-06. Write to his old friend.—Address HARRY R. BROWN, Srgt. Co. A 32nd Inf., Schofield Bks., Hawaii.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

STEVENS, WRENE GEUREA, last seen in Burns, Ore. In July 1916. Young man with blue eyes, brown hair, 5 ft. 10 in. broad shoulders. Mother's happiness at stake.—Address MRS. BELLE KNAPP, Payette, Idaho.

CAMPBELL, KENNARD, last heard of in Phrophetstown, Ill. Working for a farmer. I am very anxious about you "Red." and so are all of your Sigma Delta Phi Brothers. Please write me.—Address J. M. H. S. D. P., care *Adventure.*

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

HOFFMAN, FRANK L., last heard from at Wabasha, Minn., in 1910. Was a lumberjack at that time and also at Eau Claire, Wis. 5 ft. 10 in., medium heavy set, hazel eyes, and light brown curly hair. Generally wore slight mustache, smooth shaven. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address C. D. HOFFMAN, R. R. No. 9, Lancaster, Ohio.

HOTTENSTEIN, GEORGE EDWARD, last heard of at Pueblo, Colo. July 1914. Any one knowing his address please notify his wife.—Address MRS. G. E. HOTTENSTEIN, Box 1331, Phoenix, Ariz.

DOUGLAS, JAMES R., last seen in Kansas City, July 7th. 6 ft. 2 in., black-brown hair, light brown eyes, 32 years. Any information appreciated.—Address MRS. CLARA BELLE DOUGLAS, 2432 Cypress St., Kansas City, Mo.

RYAN, ANDREW, last seen by me in Auburn, N. Y. in 1884. Left there for Florida. Dark complexion. 5 ft. 9 in. Would like to hear from him.—Address REV. THOS. D. KENNEDY, Campus, Ill.

KING, JIM, will you please write to me. Business.—Address A. N. SHELDON, Blasdell, N. Y.

WILLARD, THOMAS MANLEY, last heard of at Bonners Ferry, Idaho. Was there in Oct. 1916. Railroad man. 36 years, brown hair and blue eyes, 5 ft., 11 in. 175 lbs. His sister inquires.—Address MRS. AMY BATES, Cor. Trinity and J Sts., Eureka, Calif.

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EDWARDS, JOHN H., sometimes called Harry. Age 31, height 6 ft. 3 in., sandy hair, brown eyes, fair complexion, single. Mother inquires. *Montreal Star* please copy.—Address L. T. 359.

MOHONEY, ED., who was with me in Texas 1913. His old pal would like to hear from him.—Address CHARLES FREDERICKS, 452 Ely Ave., Elizabeth, N. J.

REED, H. BILL, steamer *Buckman* Dec. 2, 1913. Father is dead. Write me at once.—Address MURPH, care *Adventure*.

MACCONNELL, TALBERT. Is residing somewhere near Prospect Park, Brooklyn. I would like to communicate with some one knowing his whereabouts.—Address L. T. 358.

CHALLA, THEODORE MENAGE. Last heard of at number 8 North Washington Sq., N. Y. If anybody knows the whereabouts of my friend I would gladly accept information concerning him.—Address L. T. 357.

FISHER, "BUD" sometimes known as Freddie Finger. Was with me in Mexico 1914. Last heard from in New York City 1916. Write to your old pal "Mike."—Address L. T. 356.

NEWMAN, ROY A., last heard of in Gainesville, Ga. in 1916. Write to your old school chum "Red."—Address L. T. 355.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First or Mid-December issues of ADVENTURE. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ARMSTRONG, THOMAS; Bittel, George; Blakemore, C. Homer; Bliss, Archibald John; Garde, Corporal C. B.; Gardner, Henry; Greathouse, John T.; Gruman, Herschell J.; Helmick, Roy J. and Carl H.; Kilder, Irwin; McEnaney, Philip J.; Martin, Charles A.; Moore, Robert H.; Morrison, Karl C.; Poole, Arthur known as "Tinker"; Shepherd, "Jack" or N. G.; Signal, Clarence J.; Stanley, Jack (Quills); Stoner, William H.; Talbot, Allan Wheeler; Tallman, Henry Merritt; Tannehill, Edward Dewitt; Teddy, (E. E. G.); Thorpe, Val.; Uptegrove, Elmer; Van der Horst, Fritz; Whitlatch, James Monroe; Williams, Geo. W.; Woon, Basil.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MISCELLANEOUS: Leary, Dennie; Pete; "Batt" Strand and "Scratch"; Howard Moody; Fred Johnson; Harpoole and Mechanic, Yeager, Fred; Freeman; Wynne, H.; Mr. Bennett; Students of Chesterfield School, North Vancouver, B. C.; H. W. H.

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, B. Radke Miths, Bertha Wilkins Starkweather.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address HARRY ERWIN WADE, care *Adventure*.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

In addition to the stories mentioned on page 2, scheduled for the Mid-January Adventure, out Dec. 18th, are the following:

Claymore, (*Conclusion*)
By Arthur D. Howden Smith

In the concluding instalment of this thrilling four-part story of Old Scotland is decided the ultimate fate of *Prince Charles* and the Stuart cause.

Percival ***By Hugh S. Miller***

Williams has had about all the adventure a sailorman is capable of accommodating. And to prove it, he tells of *Percival the Terrible*, *Black Bill* and all that happened aboard the ill-fated *Hesperus*.

Lost Cañon ***By J. Allan Dunn***

Cattle are disappearing from the Four-Bar ranch at fifty to a hundred a clip. *Sandy Bourke's* business is to find out where they go. It is not an easy job.

When a Man's Hungry ***By Henry Oyen***

A man's actions, when he is starving far out in the frozen wastes, are sometimes unaccountable. Read of what *Awful Bill* does.

The Cross at Purgatory Fork
By Hapsburg Liebe

In the Tennessee Mountains—the land of family feuds—a *Caperton* makes a boast and a *Lundy* accepts the challenge. Then *Sheriff Tom Caperton* takes an undying oath.

The Saddle ***By William Dudley Pelley***

The arena boss of a Wild-West show, wherever he goes, takes along a pure white saddle. But he never rides on it. The story he relates tells you why.

Old Colonel Ptolemy
By William A. Shryer

About a dead man—a mystery so puzzling that the best efforts of the Detroit police are unavailing in unraveling it.

Gray Flannel ***By George L. Catton***

It was back in the sixties that the little French half-breed made periodic visits to the lone trading-posts with bags of raw gold. And no one ever knew where he got it. A later generation tries its hand at finding out.

A Tin Cup Trophy ***By W. C. Tuttle***

Three soulful cowpunchers and three practical-minded women from the East—hovered over by two unusual chaperons. The party goes big-game hunting. You will get a good number of chuckles over what happens.

The Lightning Rod ***By Buck Connor***

The Philippines. A tale which proves that a soldier's love of a fight may result disastrously in tedious barracks life. But not always so in real warfare.

MID-JANUARY ADVENTURE

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